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+
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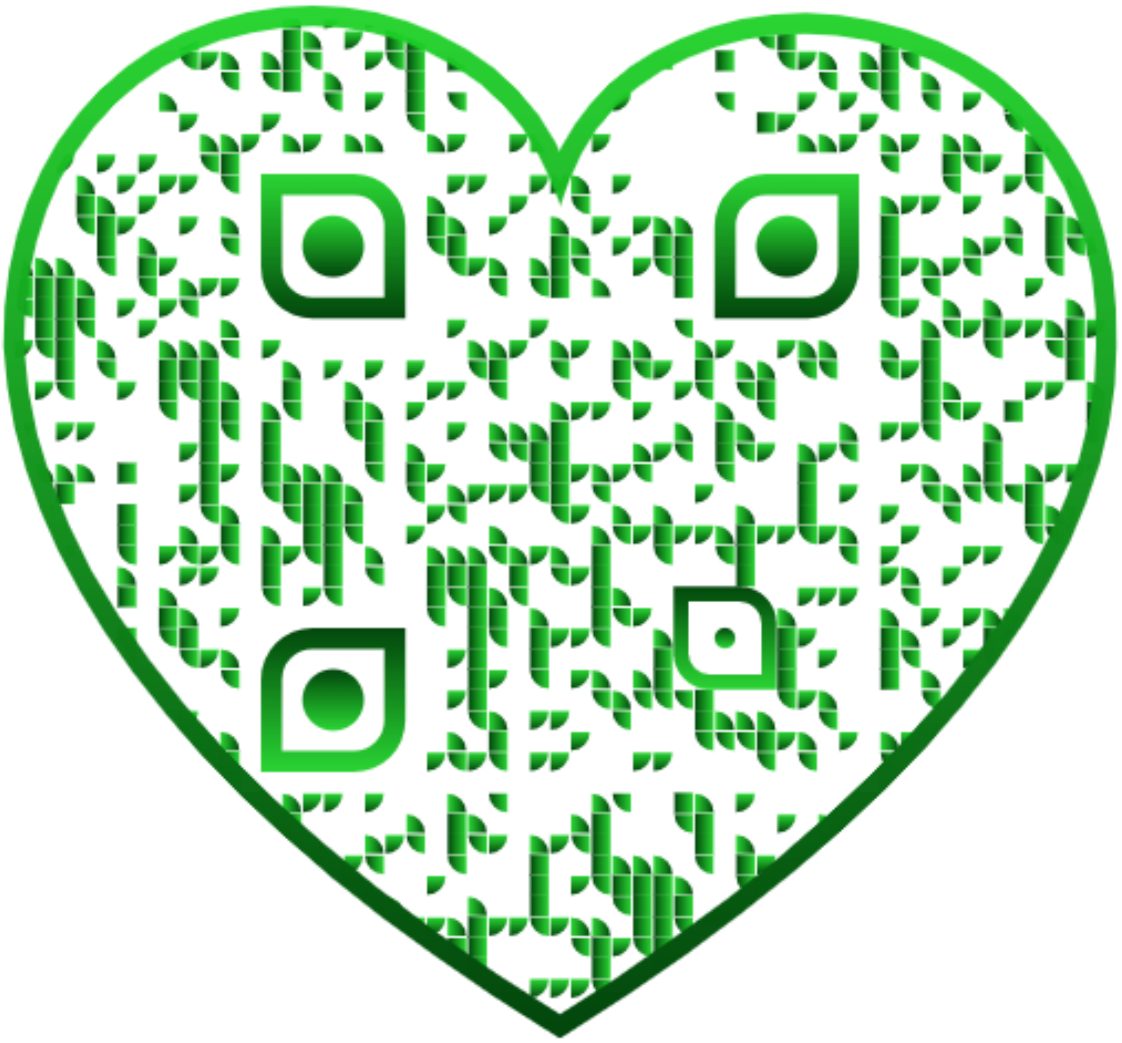
CYAN
Inside the
80s Prog Revival
How Marillion, Pendragon, IQ, Pallas, Twelfth Night and more kept the prog dream alive
GREG LAKE
Planking with David Bowie, fly fishing with Jack Hargreaves and more...
FUTURE
PROG 146
FRANCIS DUNNERY
"I can sing Peter Gabriel better than Peter Gabriel but I just can't do Phil Collins!"



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ISSUE 146 29.12.23

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STEVE HACKETT

GENESIS GREATS
LAMB HIGHLIGHTS & SOLO

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SAT 05 BRISTOL BEACON
SUN 06 CAMBRIDGE CORN EXCHANGE
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SAT 12 GUILDFORD G LIVE
SUN 13 STOKE VICTORIA HALL
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FRI 18 GLASGOW ROYAL CONCERT HALL
SAT 19 GATESHEAD GLASSHOUSE
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Contortion
Taken from *Push*

2 John Carpenter
Chariot Of Pumpkins
Taken from *Anthology II (Movie Themes 1976-1988)*

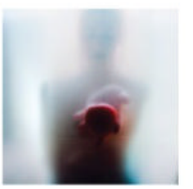
3 Spellling
Under The Sun
Taken from *Spellling & The Mystery School*

4 Constant Smiles
Gold Like Water
Taken from *Kenneth Anger*

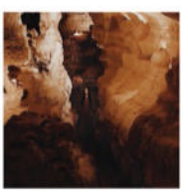
5 Maria BC
Amber
Taken from *Spike Field*

6 Hilary Woods
Where The Bough Has Broken
Taken from *Acts Of Light*

7 Boris
Drowning By Numbers
Taken from *W*



8 Indigo Sparke
In The Garden
Taken from *In The Garden* (single)



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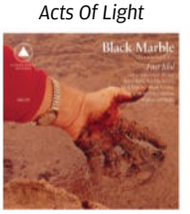
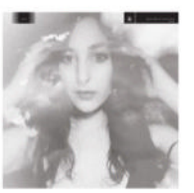
Lost
Taken from *Arkhon*



10 Black Marble
Somewhere
Taken from *Fast Idol*

11 Mort Garson
Plantasia
Taken from *Mother Earth's Plantasia*



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The Valley
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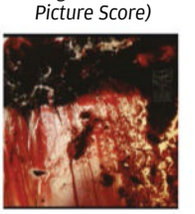

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Taken from *To Be Cruel*

Ed's Letter

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Hello and welcome to the latest issue of *Prog*. It's always weird writing the Editor's Letter at this time of year. Given the magazine production schedule, it's still early December, we haven't even enjoyed the festive break yet, but *Prog* 146 is on sale on December 29. It really messes with your internal clock!

Nothing weird about our cover stars this issue, though. In December 1982, I saw Marillion at two of their three Marquee Xmas gigs, along with support acts Solstice and Pendragon. A year later, Marillion had a Top 10 album under their belts and had appeared at Reading Festival, alongside the aforementioned, plus Pallas and Twelfth Night for good measure. The so-called UK prog revival was in full swing. Taking 1983 as the central year, we're celebrating 40 years of a musical movement that's so important in our lives! Dave Everley speaks to some of those involved, many of whom are still going strong in today's scene, to paint a fascinating picture of the time. You can read his enthralling feature on p28.

Elsewhere Francis Dunnery reflects on his career to date (p72), we take a peek inside Greg Lake's private family photo album (p40) and celebrate Nektar's 1973 opus *Remember The Future*, as well as honour late drummer Ron Howden (p52), while Moon Safari, Mariusz Duda, Earthside, Tarja's Outlanders, Cyan and D'Virgilio Morse & Jennings all bring us up to speed with their current releases.

And, of course, it being the end of another year, we feature the *Prog* Writers' Albums Of The Year on p78, and reveal our favourite release of 2023. It's always one to inspire often-fevered debate, so, as usual, we look forward to hearing your opinions.

Which just leaves me to wish you all a happy and prosperous New Year. I'd like to personally thank each and every one of you for supporting the magazine this year. It's hugely appreciated by us all here at *Prog* Towers. And on to 2024. Let's all make it a progtastic one!

Jerry Ewing – Editor

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WEDNESDAY 31 CHANTEL MCGREGOR	APR - SUNDAY 07 PROGFATHERS	SUNDAY 21 EBB
FEB - SUNDAY 04 BEATRIX PLAYERS	SUNDAY 21 SOLSTICE + EBONY BUCKLE	AUG - SUNDAY 04 THIS WINTER MACHINE
THURSDAY 08 WILSON & WAKEMAN	FRIDAY 26 CREEDENCE CLEARWATER REVIVAL	SEPT - SUNDAY 01 LEE ABRAHAM BAND
FRIDAY 16 TOOL SHED	SUNDAY 28 KYROS + AZURE	OCT - SUNDAY 27 DRIFTING SUN
SUNDAY 03 FRANCK CARDUCCI + LESOIR	MAY - SUNDAY 05 ALSO EDEN	NOV - SUNDAY 24 THE WATCH (GENESIS TRIBUTE)
MAR - WEDNESDAY 13 OZRIC TENTACLES + GONG	WEDNESDAY 22 STEELY SCAM	DEC - SUNDAY 15 THAT JOE PAYNE
THURSDAY 21 MOVING PICTURES (RUSH TRIBUTE)	SUNDAY 16 JOHN HACKETT	

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AN ASTONISHING BOX

I'm really enjoying the epic four-LP box set of Dream Theater's concept album, *The Astonishing*. It has a ring of *Dune*-inspired prog metal space opera all in 180g black vinyl housed in two gatefold jackets with inserts. Love the artwork inside and out. I don't think I had the patience before to listen all the way through, but it finally connected with me. Very enjoyable listen.

Paul Watson, via Facebook

THE NEW DAWN OF PROG

On *Prog* 145's cover, you wrote: "*90125*: the blueprint for a new prog era?" I would argue that where Yes, Asia, Genesis, Floyd, etc. were going at that time, i.e. more commercial, gave rise to the new wave of prog bands like Marillion, Solstice, IQ, Twelfth Night, Pendragon, etc. as a reaction to and against that commerciality, not an influence. Surely they were listening more to, and playing closer [attention] to the earlier output of those bands because those big bands had abandoned it? Ozrics, Steven Wilson and a few others emerged from more the free festival side of things, didn't they? Or maybe I'm getting the thrust of the assertion of last month's lead article wrong?

Kit Robinson, via Facebook

Given that many of the 80s bands you mention were already up and running by the turn of the decade, a reaction to the differing sounds of the 70s bands is unlikely, Kit. The headline referred more to Yes themselves, although also looking at the way progressive music would continue to evolve over the next 40 years. — Ed.

A QUESTION OF DELIVERY

I went to see The Flower Kings at Dingwalls in London with much anticipation and came away deflated. Goodness, what a whinefest!

Roine [Stolt] came on and his first words were to complain about the size of the stage. Now the venue has played host to some serious musicians who have coped well enough. Then each song was punctuated by the two guitarists' complaints about the gear, stage sound, mixing desk and Brexit. The rest of the band were looking on with a 'FFS, get on with it!' expression. Apparently their gear was still in Belgium and they had to hire but surely a sound check is where you sort out those problems?

I recall a memorable gig in Ronnie Scott's where Tribal Tech mentioned once that Lufthansa had lost some of their kit and then went on without further mention of it to play one of best gigs I have seen. Professionals.

***Prog* 145's cover. But was this new era evolution or revolution?**

Tiger Moth Tales' Peter Jones: if you get the chance to check out one of his shows, take it!

PRESS/ANDREW LAWSON

The constant whining affected The Flower Kings' performance, giving a 'Let's just get through this' delivery and spoiled our enjoyment. The highlight was the immense musicality of the keyboard player, whose outstanding performance saved the day. Full marks to the audience — they were very forgiving and supportive — but that generous response did nothing to stem the complaining.

This bond between fan and performer is a head-scratcher. If you purchase an item and it's not right, you return it to the seller, and if you purchase a service you have a right to complain and get it rectified. If you spend £200 on a combo of tickets, trains and hotels for a performance, you are at the mercy of the performers with no recourse.

I guess you need to trust the band to have enough professionalism to treat the performance with respect (like Tribal Tech). Lesson learned.

Wayne Winstone, via email

THE STATE OF PROG

After 17 editions, Night Of The Prog, one of Europe's largest prog festivals, is going to end. Reasons given by the organisers are recent events such as Brexit, the coronavirus pandemic and the war in Ukraine. I suspect their impact might not have been as severe if at the same time attendance had increased. But you take a good look around at the Night Of The Prog, you'll see where the problem lies. When I go, I am one of the youngest. At 50. And that's alarming.

Tull's *The Broadsword And The Beast* on the cover of *Prog* 143 was the perfect epitomisation of what is wrong: a 40-year-old album by a 55-year-old

A few months ago a friend suggested I check out Tiger Moth Tales. Following a cursory listen on Spotify, I replied that it's not my cup of tea. Roll forward to November 2023 and I had two nights booked at Trading Boundaries to see the amazing Barock Project. Support was Peter Jones, aka Tiger Moth Tales. My first reaction was, "I hope it doesn't mean a shorter BP set."

On the first night, I sat listening to Peter and, as the set went on, I became drawn into his performance. The next day it began to sink in how good he was. I looked forward to the second evening with a completely different attitude. Not only would I see one of my favourite bands but I would get to experience another performance by Peter. He didn't disappoint. I was blown away.

I bought his latest album and revisited his material on Spotify. All his albums immediately went on my Christmas list. The question is: why didn't I react that way on first hearing his album. Why did I just dismiss it? I recall I did something similar with Big Big Train until I saw them live. It's a lesson learned and I would urge all prog fans to really ask themselves if they are as open to new music as they could be. After all, we can't live in the past forever and there is great music being made every day. Embrace it.

Mike Johns, via email

This issue's star letter wins a goodie bag from burningshed.com *Contents may vary*

band, and it's not even a prog album. Beyond the cover, the magazine itself made it even clearer, relying on bands that are 30, 40, 50 years old, or on younger bands that either emulate these role models or simply are not prog at all. Issue 144 had Keith Emerson, Rick Wright, Trevor Rabin, John Wetton, Steven Wilson, Yes, Neal Morse, The Flower Kings, Galahad, Ozric Tentacles, Big Big Train and Ayreon on the cover lines. Of these musicians, Steven Wilson is the youngest at 56, the rest are older — three of them already dead. Is that supposed to motivate any young people?

In recent years, three of the hubs of prog creativity have been Japan, Norway and France. This is hardly ever mentioned by anyone and far less talked about than, say, some crappy recent Yes album. I understand that people have become risk averse, [and] that's why you tend to cling to the stuff you know works. But how many of these people still make good music? And even if they do, shouldn't we look ahead instead of backwards? We should be sharpening the profile of progressive rock by identifying a few really good young bands that have a real shot at becoming the new Yes, the new Spock's Beard or the new Dream Theater. There are more than enough candidates.

But hey, what do I know? The letters are all about VdGG, Jon Anderson, Yes and Pink Floyd. And in the final year of the Night Of The Prog, the same old guys will again be cheering on the same old bands.

Nik Brückner, Germany

A WONDERFUL COMEBACK

My wife and I have just got back from watching Beatrix Players at Acapela Studio in Cardiff — what a performance!

It was through *Prog* that I discovered the band and Amy Birks' subsequent solo albums, and I was delighted to hear they'd reformed. I ordered the comeback album, *Living And Alive*, in September and was really impressed — it's one of my favourite albums of 2023. To be able to see the new line-up perform songs from it locally was a real Christmas treat.

Thank you to *Prog* for introducing me and my wife to such incredible talent. It's one of the few prog gigs she's willingly joined me for!

Dave Thomas, Cardiff

Thanks for your email, Dave. Keep an eye out for the next issue of Prog to see how Beatrix Players fare in our annual readers' poll, and turn to p78 of this issue to find out which albums got our writers hitting the 'repeat' button in 2023. — Dep. Ed.

Beatrix Players: a live treat!

PRESS/RICHARD SHAKESPEARE

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INTRO

IF IT'S OUT THERE, IT'S IN HERE

HAWKWIND LIFT OFF INTO ORBIT

With new album *Stories From Time And Space* set for release in April, the mighty Hawkwind are already looking ahead to their next by working with producer William Orbit.

Space rockers Hawkwind have announced a run of tour dates for spring 2024, and revealed that the title of their next studio album will be *Stories From Time And Space*. It'll be released via Cherry Red in April.

"We haven't actually done anything about space for ages," guitarist Magnus Martin tells *Prog* of the album's origins. "So we thought, 'Let's actually do some space rock.' There's also this amazing book that [author and former music impresario] Rob Godwin has written about space rock and Hawkwind as well, so that's what got us thinking about actually just doing a space rock album, you know?"

The gestation of *Stories From Time And Space* goes back almost a year, when Hawkwind founder and leader Dave Brock told *Prog* that work was already underway on it just as 2023's *The Future Never Waits* was about to be released.

"Yeah, we constantly write stuff as we go along," says Brock. "We turf out tracks that we don't think are very good. And then put new ones in that are better. I mean, this is the essence of being an artist."

"It's a totally different album from what we started," adds Martin. "It's like you do the bulk of it and then doing the last 10 to 20 per cent is the really difficult bit. And then deciding which tracks to ditch and which ones to keep. There's loads of great stuff in the bin!"

Despite the band's ongoing creative endeavours, the pair also reveal that their much-vaunted collaboration with super-producer and dance remixer William Orbit — whose credits include Madonna, Blur and Beth Orton — hasn't taken off quite as anticipated.

Having rehearsed with Hawkwind in Dave Brock's Devon studio and appeared with them at the Royal Albert Hall as part of their Evening Of Sonic Destruction in September 2023, his participation on *Stories From Time And Space* was curtailed when the album's deadlines proved too tight as well as him being committed to another project.

"He went off with some famous singer to do another album — an American woman. I can't say any more than that," says Brock with a conspiratorial nod.

According to the long-time bandleader, the initial album production ideas met with the

Are you sitting comfortably? Hawkwind have stories of time and space to tell you!

> **"We haven't actually done anything about space for ages."**

group's approval, but things then went quiet at Orbit's end.

"He did one track," recalls Brock. "We'd just send him basically a two-track file. And he overdubbed some stuff on it, and it was certainly great. Then he said, 'Oh, can you send me the multitrack?' and we sent the multitrack and we didn't hear from him!"

Brock continues, "I managed to get hold of him, and he says, 'I'm really sorry about this, everybody. It's really been my dream to work with Hawkwind, but unfortunately, I've got involved with this [other project]!'"

"He was really keen and really wanted to get involved," adds Martin. "It just turned out that the deadline and the amount of work that needs doing meant that it just wasn't going to happen for this album."

However, Brock is optimistic that the work between Hawkwind and William Orbit will appear on the band's next album.

"He's sending stuff backwards and forwards and will send more when he's got the time," confirms Brock.

Quite what will happen remains to be seen, but there seems to be no stopping Hawkwind.

The band hit the road in April 2024 and will play Wolverhampton's Wulfrun Hall (3), Manchester's Academy (4), Newcastle's O2 City Hall (5), Edinburgh's O2 Academy (6), Glasgow's Academy (7). They also play Bath Forum on August 16.

See www.hawkwind.com for more. **JM**

PRESS/MARIANNE HARRIS

This month, Intro was compiled by
Chris Cope
Jerry Ewing
Jo Kendall
Martin Kielty
Stephen Lambe
Rhodri Marsden
Julian Marszalek
Matt Mills
Natasha Scharf
Johnny Sharp
Phil Weller

ECLECTIC ALBUM FROM MADDER MORTEM

"Genre-varied" record due in January ahead of European festival shows.

PRESS/CAMILLA NESSETKNUT J BERGET

Madder Mortem: paying parental tribute.

Norwegian progressive rockers Madder Mortem have announced their first studio album in six years. *Old Eyes, New Heart* will come out on January 26 via Dark Essence. Lead single *Towers* is currently available on streaming services.

Old Eyes... is dedicated to Jacob, the father of singer Agnete M. Kirkevaag and guitarist BP M. Kirkevaag, who suffered from an obstructive lung disease and died of colon cancer. It was written and recorded during his illness, and the cover is based on one of his paintings.

"He was such a huge influence, musically: we grew up with him blasting Bach," says Agnete. "It was hard watching my strong and wise dad become less and less able to take care of himself. That, I think, contributed – a lot of the album is about turning points."

Agnete describes *Old Eyes...* as "very genre-varied".

"It spans from very, very heavy and sometimes dissonant, atonal stuff all the way to some songs that are very sweet, melodic and beautiful," she explains. "It's sneaky prog – more complex than you might think at first listen."

Madder Mortem will promote the album with two European festival appearances, in Oslo at Norway's Inferno Metal Festival in March and Baarlo, Netherlands' ProgPower in October. They also hope to play more shows in 2024 that aren't financially or personally "disruptive".

"We'd love to tour, but then you crash into reality because the cost of touring is horrendous," says Agnete.

See www.maddermortem.com for more. **MM**

COLOSSEUM ANNOUNCE BOX SET AND 2024 LIVE DATES

Rarities and live material are housed with first four albums.

Progressive jazz-prog fusionists Colosseum have announced the release of the six-CD box set, *Colosseum: Elegy — The Recordings 1968-1971*, on February 23 via Esoteric Recordings, as well as a series of live dates in England and Germany.

The set includes the albums *Those Who Are About To Die Salute You*, *Valentyne Suite*, *The Grass Is Greener*, *Daughter Of Time* and *Colosseum Live*. The sixth disc includes 12 bonus tracks taken from studio sessions and live recordings captured in Manchester University and Bristol University in 1971. The band formed in 1968 by drummer Jon Hiseman and saxophonist Dick Heckstall-Smith. They disbanded in 1974 before reforming in 1994.

Colosseum tour England in February and play London's The Forge (4), Manchester's Band On The Wall (6) and Kendall's Brewery Arts (9). They then play Germany in March, calling at Dresden's Alter Schlachthof (16), Bonn's Harmonie (19), Erfurt's HsD Gewerkschaftshaus (21) and Roth's Kulturfabrik (22).

See www.facebook.com/Colosseum.Band for more information. **JM**

PRESS

Colosseum: thumbs up for box set and tour.

THE PINEAPPLE THIEF SWITCH GEARS ON UPCOMING ALBUM

An old-school approach yields dividends.

The Pineapple Thief: going toe-to-toe with their songwriting.

PRESS/TINA KORHONEN

The Pineapple Thief have revealed details of their forthcoming album, *It Leads To This*, due for release on Kscope on February 9.

It's the Somerset formed art-rock quartet's 14th album of new material, and their fourth to feature erstwhile King Crimson and Porcupine Tree drummer Gavin Harrison. The percussion maestro again took an active role in composing the album, and this time around, he and TPT frontman Bruce Soord decided to do things differently. In contrast to the process of writing and constructing songs remotely that they and their bandmates had taken with previous albums, Soord and Harrison worked up the bulk of the record in the same room.

Says Soord, "When I was driving back from Gavin's house after working together for several days, I felt like a zombie because I don't think I've ever put myself through that kind of intense collaborative songwriting experience before."

Harrison found it an invigorating experience:

"Previously, Bruce would write something, send it to me and we'd go back and forth that way. This was more working up ideas together in the moment. And I think it makes these songs sound different to any we've done before."

The eight tracks that made it onto the finished album have also ended up relatively concise compared to the long-form affairs on previous records ("I think the phrase someone coined was 'fat free,'" says Soord). Nonetheless, there's an intriguing complexity to some of Harrison's rhythm tracks that still push boundaries.

"You could say that every chord in the world has been played," he says, "but rhythmically, I don't think everything's been covered, and I still strive to come up with something original. I feel like I've done that on this record."

Lyrically, the topical influence that marked 2020's *Versions Of The Truth* can also be heard on *It Leads To This*.

"Again, it's informed by what's going on in the world," says Soord, "and unfortunately right now it's a bit of a shitshow. But there's an unspoken question mark after that title, *It Leads To This* — it doesn't have to be that way and I still have hope."

> **"I still strive to come up with something original. I feel I've done that."**

The band's 2024 tour starts on February 20 at Manchester's O2 Ritz, and Soord expects several new tracks will be showcased at those shows among tracks spanning much of the group's 25-year career. **JS**

See www.pineapplethief.com for more.

INTRO extras

WILEMAN PREPARES FOLK HORROR CONCEPT

Karda Estra's Richard Wileman has announced that he will release his latest solo album, *The Forked Road*, through Kavus Torabi's Believers Roast label on January 12. It's described as a "prog and folk horror concept album" and features Amy Fry (vocals, clarinet and saxophone), Chantelle Smith (vocals, harp) and his daughter Sienna Wileman on sound recordings. See richardwileman.bandcamp.com.

All change: the new-look Big Big Train have arrived.

PRESS/MASSIMO GOINA

BIG BIG TRAIN BACK WITH NEW ALBUM AND LINE-UP

Singer Alberto Bravin makes his LP debut.

When Big Big Train release *The Likes Of Us* via InsideOutMusic on March 1, they're expecting an emotional reaction. Their first studio title since the death of frontman David Longdon features Alberto Bravin in his place. And although mainstay Greg Spawton thought they'd simply found their new voice – deliberately distinct from Longdon's – he discovered the Italian was also a writer and a studio wizard.

Stating the case for the new line-up, Bravin's vocals are heard almost as soon as lead track *Light Left In The Day* kicks in. "It unfurled very naturally," Spawton says. "We actually thought of it as a 30-second secret track at the end... but things changed."

A slightly heavier edge is also soon in play, and while Bravin takes responsibility for that, he asserts: "Most of it is Nick D'Virgilio on *Oblivion* and *Beneath The Masts*." Describing his aim in mixing the LP, he says: "You have to bear in mind Genesis in 1973, but the overall sound needs to be competitive."

Spawton argues, "We were getting a bit of a reputation as a folk-rock band, but we're a rock band. So I'm pleased we've got more guitar attack."

With tour dates coming and ideas developing for the next record, the pair are desperate to discover what fans think of the album. "I've been a bit low, and these guys have propped me up," Spawton says of working without Longdon. "It's been an emotional but positive experience. It didn't have to be like that."

For more information see www.bigbigtrain.com. **MK**

MIDAS FALL UNVEIL FIRST NEW ALBUM IN SIX YEARS

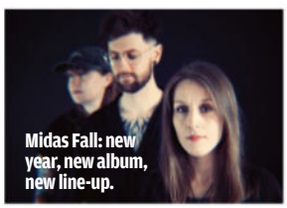
Cold Waves Divide Us promises to be an atmospheric treat.

Prog Award winning Scottish post-rock trio Midas Fall have announced that they will release *Cold Waves Divide Us*, their first new album for six years, through Monotreme Records on March 8.

Cold Waves Divide Us, the follow-up to 2018 album *Evaporate* and the band's fifth overall, is the first studio album that Midas Fall have recorded as a trio, with Michael Hamilton joining founding members Elizabeth Heaton and Rowan Burn.

"This album is a heavier and bigger experience than the last," says Heaton. "We kept the atmospheric strings and 80s synths of *Evaporate* but wanted to add heavier layered elements, to represent more what we sound like live."

Cold Waves Divide Us will be released digitally, as well as on CD and a limited pressing of 500 LPs on 180g vinyl (150 black, 350 clear with orange and black splatter). A limited amount of 50 will also contain an A5 booklet with images of Heaton's handwritten lyrics. Info at www.midasfall.com. **JE**


Midas Fall: new year, new album, new line-up.

PRESS/STEPHEN ALEXANDER

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RICK WAKEMAN
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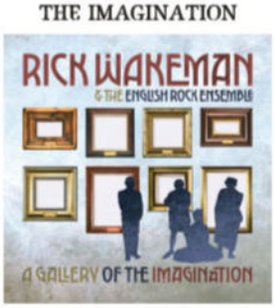
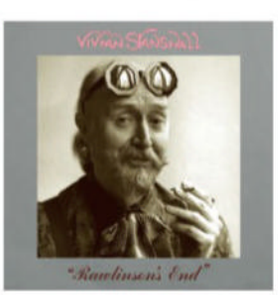
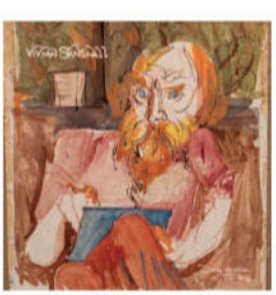


VIVIAN STANSHALL
RAWLINSON'S END / DOG HOWL IN TUNE





THE ARISTOCRATS GO QUACKERS ON THEIR FIFTH ALBUM

Duck comes with a twist.

The Aristocrats: topping the bill with their new concept album.

PRESS/JON LUINI

The Aristocrats' fifth album, *Duck*, might be conceptual, but bassist Bryan Beller warns fans that it isn't your archetypal affair.

"This is an *Aristocrats* concept album," he says with a smile. "It's not *The Wall*; it's about a cartoon duck that gets kicked off an Antarctic island by a malevolent police penguin and then travels the world!"

Out on February 16 via Boing Music, the bassist explains its story was a happy accident: "[Drummer] Marco Minnemann wrote a song called *Sitting With A Duck On A Bay*, which had a 70s R&B vibe to it, but we also had a more complex song with a parenthetical title of *Duck's End*. Then we thought, 'Are we writing an album with a story here?'"

Having released their first three albums in consistent two-year cycles, Beller is thankful for the four-year turnaround with this release, saying, "We haven't made a really serious lockdown album that a lot of artists are making: this is our version. We needed to wait for the Aristocratic spirit to come back into the world."

Initially recorded at Carbonite Sound in Ojai, California, the band embraced home recording to finish the album after their allotted studio time elapsed.

"Some of these songs are denser than anything we've ever done before. The extra production time was important," Beller underscores.

Minnemann adds, "It was a luxury that allowed us to fine-tune elements that we haven't had before."

"We've experimented a lot with previous albums, but *Duck* was really defined from the beginning," the drummer continues. "Although it has many styles, it doesn't feel like it has many detours. It's the hardest record we've done; we have a lot of 'punching your face' songs, but it's also very fun. The response on the road has been remarkable!"

The band finished 2023 with what they've called a "defrost" tour cycle in the US. Beller adds that the trio "want to tour the world again" in 2024 to showcase songs that are "at an elevated level, both in recording and compositional arrangement."

With cover art by *Space Jam* animator Lance Myers, *Duck* will be available in standard and deluxe edition CD formats. The latter includes a USB 'duck' drive with behind-the-scenes footage, demos, a branded lanyard and a laminate pass. **POW**

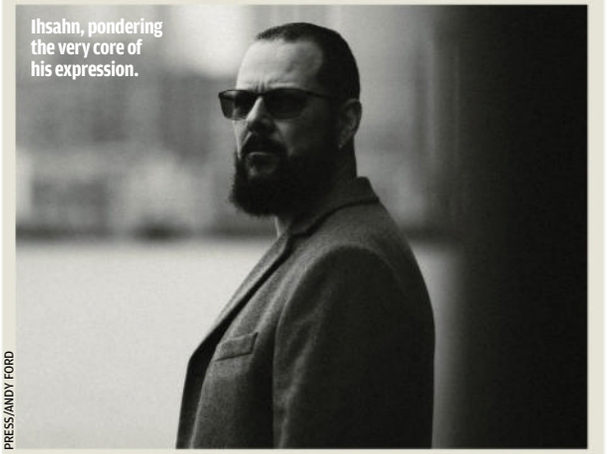
"Although it has many styles, it doesn't feel like it has many detours."

More at www.the-aristocrats-band.com.

INTRO extras

SWEDISH PROGGERS BEARDFISH ARE BACK

Swedish quartet Beardfish appear to have reformed, if a flurry of recent activity on their social media pages is correct. Most recently they shared a selfie from the studio captioned with, "follow us in the studio." Beardfish are set to play their very first show since 2015, appearing at We Låve Rock Festival in Asker Kulturhus, Norway. in May 2024. See www.instagram.com/beardfishofficial.



Ihsahn, pondering the very core of his expression.

PRESS/ANDY FORD

IHSAHN RETURNS WITH SELF-TITLED DOUBLE ALBUM

His new solo album is out in February.

Norwegian progressive metal musician Ihsahn will release his long-awaited eighth solo album on February 16 via Candlelight. The 100-minute, self-titled double record contains two different versions of each song: while one disc is progressive metal, the other is purely orchestral.

"It's been a long time since my last full-length album [2018's *Àmr*]," says Ihsahn. "I did some experiments with some EPs [2020's *Telemark* and *Pharos*], and I came to a point where I just wanted to hone in on something. I thought, 'What's the very core of my expression?' And it's always been blending orchestral soundtracks with extreme metal."

The musician, who's fronted symphonic black metal band Emperor since 1991 and started his solo career in 2006, describes *Ihsahn* as his first concept album.

"It's a very traditional hero's journey, John Campbell-style," he says. "I'm not reinventing the wheel, it's all very classic storytelling. Even the orchestrations are extremely classic in their setup: a symphony orchestra, and the black metal parts are guitars, bass and so on. I tried to arrange [traditional elements] together in a more interesting way."

Ihsahn claims he won't tour the album extensively but will play a number of standalone dates in 2024. Already announced are a headline slot at London's Celestial Darkness festival in March and a set at Belgium's Graspop Metal Meeting in June.

Visit www.ihsahn.com for more information. **MM**

KYROS ANNOUNCE FOURTH STUDIO ALBUM

Mannequin is their first with new bassist, Charlie Cawood.

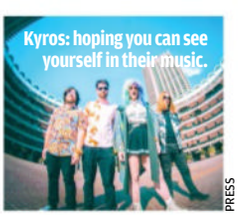
UK prog rockers Kyros have confirmed their latest record, *Mannequin*, will be out via White Star Records on February 2.

"*Mannequin* is like peeling back layers of paint on an old canvas," explains vocalist and keyboardist Shelby Logan Warne. "With each track, we're exploring the masks we all wear, the stories we tell ourselves to get by.

"This album is a real heart-on-sleeve affair for us and it's probably the most 'us' we've ever sounded. It's about what happens when the façade cracks and you're left with nothing but the truth. Nothing but your true self. We can't wait for everyone to hear it and perhaps see themselves in it, just like we do."

Mannequin sees the recorded debut of bassist Charlie Cawood, who has worked with The Anchoress, Anathema, Knifeworld and the Mediæval Bæbes, among others. He replaced Peter Episcopo in July. Speaking earlier in 2023, Cawood said, "I'm very excited to be joining Kyros for the next stage of their sonic adventure."

See www.kyrosmusic.com for live dates and more. **JE**



Kyros: hoping you can see yourself in their music.

PRESS

FAD GADGETS

Rhodri Marsden on three of the latest must-have gizmos currently putting the prog in progress.

LOOG PIANO

Loog made their name creating tiny guitars for little hands, from cute three-string Telecasters to six-string acoustics, all of them smashing their Kickstarter targets. They've now turned their attention to the keyboard, with this cute but surprisingly pro-sounding mini piano for kids. A world away from those cheap plastic toy keyboards with buttons devoted to playing tinny versions of *Old MacDonald*, this has proper dynamics, stereo sound and a classy finish, with all the cartoony tutoring gubbins confined to an app. Kids will love it, but adults will find themselves drawn to it, too. Beautifully done.

www.loogguitars.com

ALTO BUSKER

As battery technology improves, the ability to put on concerts and performances away from mains power sources becomes easier and easier. Boss, Korg and Soundboks are all competing in this space, but this portable amp/speaker from Alto is versatile and hard-working: it can be placed tilted-up on the floor or mounted on a pole, and in eco mode (maximum output 50W) can keep going for 24 hours on one charge, which you'd say is more than sufficient for the average busker. Of course it also doubles as a Bluetooth speaker – it would be weird if it didn't.

www.altoprofessional.com

MURO BOX N40

Mechanical musical boxes have enchanted listeners since the 19th century, and in a digital age they still have a strange charm and allure. As someone who bought one for his wife for her birthday and spent many hours creating punch cards to play her favourite tunes, I'm mildly furious to discover the Muro Box, which has all the mechanical splendour of a music box but operable via an app. This new 40-note version gives you nearly four octaves to play with; musos will appreciate the MIDI, USB-C and 6.5mm sockets for hooking up to external gear.

www.murobox.com

MY PROG HERO

Inspiring the wider music world...

You got spirit, kid: Matty Mayz (inset, far right) is unyielding in his love for Coheed And Cambria.

PRESS/ALEXANDRA GAVILLET

PRESS/TOMMY VO

MATTY MAYZ

He's busy fusing hip-hop and heavy metal for the 21st century, but the Oxymorrons drummer loves the sci-fi prog of **Coheed And Cambria**.

"I used to take drum lessons at a place called the Long Island Drum Center in Nyack in New York state. I found out that there was a band that was blowing up from around that area and that they [Coheed And Cambria] used to rehearse in Nyack. So I'm like, 'Cool, a local band that's making waves!' And I'd watch them just getting bigger and bigger. This was around the time of *In Keeping Secrets Of Silent Earth: 3* and I was really fascinated by them.

There are so many nuances about that band. First of all, the progression of where they started and what they became and secondly, they were just obviously very album-focused. They have this ongoing sci-fi plot going across their albums that they then turned into a comic book series. Every single one of their albums felt like a piece of a much larger puzzle. It was very cool that they were able to grab singles out of them, but the album is what felt so important because it was part of the larger story.

Good Apollo I'm Burning Star IV, Volume One: From Fear Through The Eyes Of Madness is where I feel that they took that pivot from a lot of the post-hardcore stuff and really became a prog rock band. It was clearly the point where it felt like it was such a different album than everything else. They started to deviate away from normal song structures, like, 'This is clearly the hook, and this is the verse, and then this is the bridge and now we're going back to it.' That record, for me, sounds like something so different, but it was still Coheed And Cambria the whole time.

There's this theatre about their live performance that feels like more than just watching a band perform. It feels passionate; it feels like it comes from the gut up. Everything is just so epic. The way that they curate their show, they're not just playing an album back-to-front. It's as if someone was writing a play and giving people these moments of reprieve and then these really huge, epic moments; it's really a journey. I got goosebumps the first time I saw them perform; they're amazing musicians." **JM**

"Every single one of their albums felt like a piece of a much larger puzzle."

Oxymorrons' debut album, Melanin Punks, is out now on Mascot Records. See www.oxymorrons.com for more.

PROG IN BRIEF

Finnish prog trio **Von Hertzen Brothers** (right) have announced that they will release a brand-new live album, *Live At Tavastia*, on February 16. It will also be available to watch on demand. Details at www.vonhertzenbrothers.com.

Norwegian pop-proggers **MesaVerde** return with their second album, *All Is Well*, via Apollon Records on January 19. It was recorded over a 12-month period at their own CasaVerde studios in Oslo. See www.mesaverde.bandcamp.com for more.

Prog progenitors **Procol Harum**'s second album, *Shine On Brightly*, is being reissued on vinyl via Esoteric Recordings on February 23. Originally released in 1968, this new edition comes housed in a gatefold sleeve. See www.cherryred.co.uk.

KEITH EMERSON VARIATIONS

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CLOSURE IN MOSCOW

Outlandish Aussies overcome self-doubt to make show-stopping return.

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progzilla.com/listen/

AS VOCALIST CHRISTOPHER de Cinque delicately puts it, Closure In Moscow's story went from the clichéd tale of high-school kids jamming to "a fucking whirlwind" in the blink of an eye. Their 2008 debut EP, *The Penance And The Patience*, quickly earned the eccentric Australians a record deal with Equal Vision Records. After relocating to the USA, they wrote their LP *First Temple* on the road amid an exhaustive, and exhausting, touring schedule.

"For a few of us, that was our first time moving out of home," says de Cinque. "It was not a normal life. We wrote an album and toured the shit out of it, but the more time away from that period of our lives, the more I see it was just this absolute, on a wing and a prayer, 'clown fiesta' of a time. I think it affected us all in different ways; it was the best and the worst time."

Craving a slice of normality, the band returned home where a more grounded setting helped them write the outrageously adventurous *Pink Lemonade*, and it rapidly became something of a cult classic. Suffice to say, the nine intervening years between its release and its long-awaited follow-up, *Soft Hell*, have been fractious for the band.

"'Should' is a dirty word, but I think there should be a few more albums under our belt at this point," the singer admits. "If I can be real about it, a lot of it taking so long does come down to self-doubt and crippling anxiety. It's hard to be productive when you pile so much expectation in your own mind. But I learnt that waiting for inspiration or waiting until you feel better is a mug's game: self-doubt, fear and anxiety will always be lurking there."

On a foundation of fragile mental health came more touring, pandemics and, for some members, the life-changing effects of parenthood. But despite the tumult, the band remained dogged.

"The fire in everyone's belly never fully extinguished. There was still this burning ember for everyone to give enough of a fuck about the album to put their blood, sweat and tears into it and to go on this maddening chase down a rabbit hole to make the record as good as it can be. I think, as songwriters, it needed that extra time to come together in a way that it couldn't before."

As the Chinese proverb of the man who lost his horse tells us, sometimes we have to endure hardship before things get better. For Closure In Moscow, *Soft Hell* is a living, breathing example of that. They've found brevity and accessibility in among their delectable and charming chaos. Their latest songs are impeccably detailed, bending into wild, contorted shapes that belie expectation while always remaining laser-focused and wildly entertaining. Patience is bitter, but its fruit is far sweeter. Now, as de Cinque says, another album in a few years time would be the "ultimate indication" that Closure In Moscow are back, and they're back for good. **POW**

"Waiting for inspiration is a mug's game: self-doubt and anxiety will always be lurking."

PROG FILE

LINE-UP

Christopher de Cinque *(vocals)*, **Mansur Zennelli** *(guitar, vocals)*, **Michael Barrett** *(guitar)*, **Salvatore Aidone** *(drums)*, **Duncan Millar** *(bass)*

SOUNDS LIKE

The wonkiness of The Mars Volta and the stark madness of Zappa having an acid-laced tea party with The Dear Hunter

CURRENT RELEASE

Soft Hell is out now via Bird's Robe

WEBSITE

closureinmoscow.com

L-R: Mansur Zennelli, Michael Barrett, Duncan Millar, Christopher De Cinque, Salvatore Aidone.

PRESS/JEFF ANDERSEN JNR

VIRGINIA ASTLEY

FROM GARDENS WHERE WE FEEL SECURE

(Rough Trade, 1983)

In an increasingly tumultuous world, it's important to seek mental solace from time to time. What better chance to consider this uplifting, pastoral ambient work from British singer-songwriter Virginia Astley, which recently – softly – celebrated its 40th birthday?

Even Astley's name conjures up a watercoloured, bygone era, perhaps the days of Edith Holden's 1906 *Nature Notes*, which became a hugely successful 1977 book, *The Country Diary Of An Edwardian Lady*, comprising the art teacher's outdoor observations over a year? If only field recordings had been available to fit that landmark work...

For centuries composers invoked the natural world – birdcalls, weather, rivers, sunrise. It was only a matter of time before Vaughan Williams' *The Lark Ascending* and its ilk – alongside emerging technology to capture found sounds and foley – would inspire myriad 20th-century musicians such as The Beatles, Pink Floyd and Brian Eno.

Astley was born in Hertfordshire, her father Edwin was a TV theme composer for *Department S*, *The Saint*, *Danger Man* and *Randall And Hopkirk (Deceased)* among many others. Skilled in piano and flute, Astley briefly became a busker while studying at Guildhall Academy in the 70s, and even more briefly joined a romantic, post-punk classical-electronic trio, The Ravishing Beauties, featuring future Dream Academy member Kate St John, and Nicky Holland, who would go on to play with Ryuichi Sakamoto as well as recording and writing for Tears For Fears on their 1989 album, *The Seeds Of Love*.

All the while Astley planned a debut record, *She Sat Down And Cried*. But she was also dreaming up an instrumental album on a theme of a summer's day. Astley spent two months in the Oxfordshire countryside with her co-producer Russell Webb, making field recordings on a portable unit to add to *From Gardens Where We Feel Secure*. She recorded this in her dad's rural shed, on his eight-track, with Webb on acoustic guitar and Astley on piano and flute, guests contributing clarinet and backing vocals.

Inspiration came from poet WH Auden – a line from *The Summer Night* provided the album title – and the record is serene, melodic and as refreshing as the breeze. Piano, flute and birdsong start the day, *With My Eyes Open*. Church bells herald the swift piano and choir of *A Summer Long Since Passed*, then the title track takes a sedate, Eno-esque stroll. *Hiding The Ha Ha* is gently playful, leading to the sleepy, snore-y swing of *Out On The Lawn I Lie In Bed* and *Summer Of Their Dreams*. *Too Bright For Peacocks* is hypnotically Einaudi-like, complete with looped lambs' cries.

When The Fields Were On Fire turns experimental/folk horror (referencing a nightmare Astley's mother had), but it's all rounded off by the sultry, cricket-buzzing, owl-hooting *It's Too Hot To Sleep*.

Under a parasol with Sylvian, Sakamoto and XTC's *Summer's Cauldron*, these *Gardens*... are certainly worth a visit.

JO KENDALL

ALL AROUND THE WORLD

Our far-out trip to far-flung prog

PRESS/JAVIER BRAVO

Still going strong! Chile's Tryo are looking forward to more years of performing together.

TRYO

Currently touring for their 35th anniversary, these Chilean proggers reveal how musical traditions infuse their music.

Even before they'd released a note of music, Chile's Tryo found themselves opening for prog royalty, Yes at the Quinta Vergara Amphitheater in Viña del Mar. "It was a big honour!" beams bandmanager Ignacio Carvajal Gómez. It was also the culmination of seven years' hard work.

Formed in 1987 in the Chilean port city of Valparaíso by brothers Ismael and Francisco Cortez Aguilera on guitars and bass respectively, and drummer Félix Carbonne Kind (recently replaced by his protégé Felipe Baldrich Maldonado), the group found success on the college circuit before releasing their eponymous debut album in 1996. Since then, the band — now augmented by keyboardist Pablo Martínez Rodríguez — have released a further six albums, the most recent of which, *Suramérica*, came out earlier this year.

Pondering their motivation, Ismael says, "We love the music and the language that we have created together. We're not just family — we're also very good friends."

Originally inspired by King Crimson and The Mahavishnu Orchestra, Tryo have developed their sound over the years to encompass a number of permutations.

"Nowadays, the band sound more progressive, and with a greater rock fusion and more open to other kinds of music," says Francisco. "From the beginning, it was important for us to be playing not only in an electric format, but also acoustic formats. And we've also played with orchestras and choirs. So we have a very wide range of music."

Just as importantly, Tryo's sound is informed by Chile's own music and cultural traditions.

"We've always made music and art that's influenced by our ancestors. Whether it's costumes or colours or music from this part of the world, we're trying to put that into every album," says Francisco.

"We've always made music that has been inspired by our ancestors."

"We're trying to transcend as musicians," adds Ismael. "Our objective is to create something new and important to contribute something positive to the lives of people." **JM**

Suramérica is out now. See www.facebook.com/TRYOChile for more info.

FIN COSTELLO/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGE

PROG IN BRIEF

Richard Thompson's (right) *Historic Classic Concert Live In Nottingham 1986* makes its first appearance on CD as a two-disc package when it's released via Store For Music on January 26. Tracks include For more visit www.richardthompson-music.com.

Former **Pain Of Salvation** bassist **Kristoffer Gildenlöw** releases his fifth solo album, *Empty*, on February 8. On it, he contemplates whether our existence, as observed by the creator, might have been a mistake. More details at www.kristoffergildenlow.com.

PROG PRESENTS NEW MUSIC
Listen to
GABRIEL KAHANE
all this month on
PROGZILLA RADIO
progzilla.com/listen/

PRESS/JASON QUIGLEY

Gabriel Kahane, a man of many odd time signatures.

GABRIEL KAHANE

Meet the forward-thinking singer-songwriter who juggles catchiness with complexity.

GABRIEL KAHANE HAS been furrowing his own path in folk, singer-songwriter and compositional circles for years, but he quips — mainly by virtue of his many, many odd time signatures — that he's "guilty as charged" when it comes to meriting being talked about in the progressive realm.

The American pianist, multi-instrumentalist and vocalist may not be known by the masses, but his prodigious talent deserves a much wider audience — and his penchant for thinking outside the box, peppered with radio-friendly hooks, is abundantly clear.

Take his latest solo album, *Magnificent Bird*, for instance: the record was the product of a song-a-day writing challenge during one month of a year-long absence from the internet. It's accessible yet melancholic and multi-layered, with free-roaming piano runs and melodies regularly taking experimental detours; for the latter, try the tune *The Basement Engineer*, a standout wacky trip.

"Every day basically began the same way — I'd start writing longhand," Kahane says as he explains how the 2022 record came together.

"I'd write until my hand cramped or until I felt I had something. And then I would type it up, print it out, mark it up, make a new draft. Usually somewhere between three or five drafts in, I'd have something where I would take it to the piano."

More generally, the Oregon-based Kahane says he wants to make tracks that people "have a reason to return to over and over again. I think if you make music like I do, particularly in an era where music education has gone to shit pretty much everywhere, it's probably not going to land for a lot of people first time. It really does demand second, third, maybe fourth listening," he adds.

While Kahane — who has collaborated with prog-friendly pianist Brad Mehldau as well as Paul Simon, Phoebe Bridgers and Chris Thile — has released five solo albums to date, his other musical avenue is composing, and he has numerous collaborations with orchestras and ensembles on his glowing CV. These works tend to diverge even more into the avant-garde, with Kahane animatedly painting from a multicoloured palette of notes and rhythms.

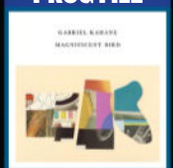
"I didn't ever set out to write for orchestra or string quartets, that wasn't part of the plan," he says. "I had a lot of interests as a kid. I played chess, I played baseball, I sang in operas, I got interested in improvised music and jazz piano as a teenager. I spent most of college focused on theatre and acting."

But it was with his eccentric 2006 piece, *Craigslistlieder* — piano and operatic vocal vignettes based on real adverts from the online US marketplace Craigslist — that caught the attention of those in classical music circles.

Further highlighting the variety in Kahane's career, he's scheduled to perform with the BBC Concert Orchestra in London in late January as they run through his piece *Emergency Shelter Intake Form*, a "deep dive into inequality through the lens of homeless and housing issues" in the US. **CC**

"I try to make things that people have a reason to return to over and over again."

PROG FILE



LINE-UP

Gabriel Kahane *(vocals, piano, synths, guitars, banjo, electric bass, drum programming)*

SOUNDS LIKE

Piano-led folk music that dares to do the unexpected

CURRENT RELEASE

Magnificent Bird is out now via Nonesuch Records

WEBSITE

gabrielkahane.bandcamp.com

Official Progressive Albums Chart

The prog top 30 albums

November 2023

Compiled by Official Charts Company

1. **STEVEN WILSON** The Harmony Codex *(SW RECORDS/VIRGIN)*
2. **ROGER WATERS** The Dark Side Of The Moon Redux *(COOKING VINYL)*
3. **WITHIN TEMPTATION** Bleed Out *(FORCE MUSIC)*
4. **MATT BERRY** Simplicity *(ACID JAZZ)*
5. **JEAN-MICHEL JARRE** Oxymoreworks *(SONY MUSIC)*
6. **GONG** Unending Ascending *(KSCOPE)*
7. **PSYCHEDELIC PORN CRUMPETS** Fronzoli *(WHAT REALITY?)*
8. **KING GIZZARD & LIZARD WIZARD** The Silver Cord *(KGLW)*
9. **GOAT** Medicine *(ROCKET RECORDINGS)*
10. **PUBLIC SERVICE BROADCASTING** This New Noise *(TEST CARD)*
11. **SIGUR RÓS** Átta *(BMG)*
12. **MIKE OLDFIELD** Tubular Bells – 50th Anniversary Edition *(UMC)*
13. **OZRIC TENTACLES** Lotus Unfolding *(KSCOPE)*
14. **YES** Mirror To The Sky *(INSIDEOUTMUSIC)*
15. **TARJA** Dark Christmas *(EARMUSIC)*
16. **TAME IMPALA** Lonerism *(FICTION)*
17. **POLYPHIA** Remember That You Will Die *(RISE)*
18. **PATTERN-SEEKING ANIMALS** Spooky Action At A Distance *(INSIDEOUTMUSIC)*
19. **D'VIRGILIO, MORSE & JENNINGS** Sophomore *(INSIDEOUTMUSIC)*
20. **TESSERACT** War Of Being *(KSCOPE)*
21. **BILL NELSON** All The Fun Of The Fair *(SONODELUXE)*
22. **JETHRO TULL** RökFlöte *(INSIDEOUTMUSIC)*
23. **JETHRO TULL** The Broadsword And The Beast *(PARLOPHONE)*
24. **KING GIZZARD & LIZARD WIZARD** PetroDragonic Apocalypse *(KGLW)*
25. **STEVE HACKETT** Foxtrot At Fifty + Hackett Highlights: Live *(INSIDEOUTMUSIC)*
26. **MOGWAI** The Hawk Is Howling (Remastered) *(ROCK ACTION)*
27. **ROGER WATERS** The Lockdown Sessions *(SONY MUSIC)*
28. **MESHUGGAH** Chaosphere *(ATOMIC FIRE)*
29. **FISH ON FRIDAY** 8MM *(ESOTERIC)*
30. **THE FLAMING LIPS** Yoshimi Battles The Pink Robots *(WARNER MUSIC)*

FIND OUT MORE AT **WWW.OFFICIALCHARTS.COM**

WIN! SPACE RITUAL BOX

In the early 70s, Hawkwind toured the UK with their mind-expanding Space Ritual shows, which were captured for posterity on the *Space Ritual* live double album released in 1973. To commemorate these groundbreaking audio-visual gigs, Cherry Red have issued a very special, super-deluxe 10-CD/Blu-ray package of the album – and we have a copy to give away to one lucky reader.

This special 50th-anniversary edition contains a new remaster of the original album; hi-resolution 5.1 mixes on Blu-ray; Stephen W Tayler's new mixes from full concerts at Liverpool Stadium, Sunderland Locarno and Brixton Sundown; a 68-page illustrated book and a reproduction of the very rare poster-format tour programme. It's a bumper set that'll help transport you to another world!

To be in with a chance of winning this star prize, visit www.bit.ly/PROG146 and answer the following question:

Hawkwind revisited the *Space Ritual* live in London in 2014, but which song, performed on their original 1972 tour, was missing from the new setlist?

a) *Silver Machine*

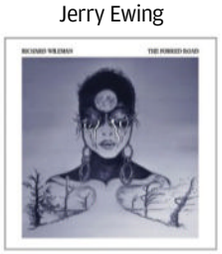
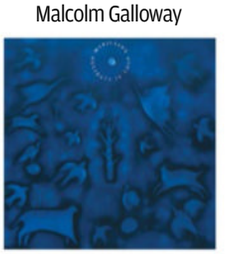
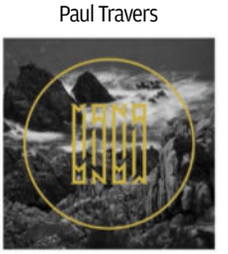
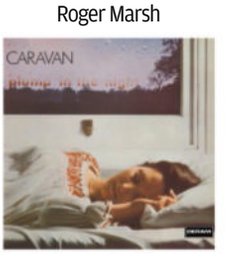
b) *Brainstorm*

c) *You Shouldn't Do That*

For more information see www.hawkwind.com.

TERMS AND CONDITIONS: This competition will be open from December 29, 2023-February 2, 2024. By entering you agree to our competition rules (available at www.futureplc.com/competition-rules). Entries limited to one per household regardless of the form of entry. Use of automated devices as methods of submission are not valid forms of entry. The winner will be selected at random from all correct entries received by the closing date. No employees of Future Publishing or any of its group companies or the employees of any entity which has been involved with the administration of this competition or any member of their households may enter this competition. All prize details are correct at time of press. The winner will be notified by Future by email after the closing date. If a winner has not responded after 28 days, an alternative winner will be drawn.

Now our turn...

The Editor Jerry Ewing	The Art Guy Russell Fairbrother	The Deputy Ed Natasha Scharf	The Musician Malcolm Galloway	The Writer Paul Travers	The Reader Roger Marsh
					
RICHARD WILEMAN	**IHSAHN**	**CALIGULA'S HORSE**	**MARILLION**	**LILI REFRAIN**	**CARAVAN**
The Forked Road BELIEVERS ROAST	**Ihsahn** CANDLELIGHT RECORDS	**Charcoal Grace** INSIDEOUTMUSIC	**Holidays In Eden** EMI	**Mana** SUBSOUND	**For Girls Who Grow Plump In The Night** DERAM

MITSUNE

Japanese folk reimagined for the 21st century with classic prog influences.

"**OUR NEW EP** is heavily influenced by *Close To The Edge*."

This comment leaves *Prog* momentarily speechless. Australian Youka Snell is discussing the forthcoming, and currently untitled, release by her Berlin-based group Mitsune. Given the band's love of Japanese folk, which includes dressing in traditional costume on stage, such an overt reference to classic prog comes somewhat unexpected.

"I played that album over and over again," says Snell. "It's an absolute masterpiece, and it's really influenced the direction of our new recording as it's one continuous 24-minute piece, with the theme at the start repeating at the end."

Mitsune categorise themselves as a Japanese neo-folk fusion band, with members hailing from Japan, Australia, Germany and Greece. They came together in 2018 as a trio based around the three-stringed lute, the Tsugaru shamisen, originally favoured by blind or itinerant musicians in ancient Japan. They perform as that trio (although third member Tina Kopp is currently taking a break from the band) but also play with double bass and percussion, as they did on their highly successful UK tour in July. Their 2022 album *Hazama* showcased the shamisen across a mixture of original material and reimagined folk tunes, but on their recent tour, the instrumentation was restricted to two shamisen. Does this affect their live sound?

"It did affect the intricacy of the three instruments interacting, and it was also a little restricting in terms of the frequency range that the shamisen can produce," Snell admits.

"Sonically, it produces sound in the upper mids, so if you look at an EQ band, there's this huge clump in that area and then no low end. As a result, it can lack the sweeping range that an acoustic guitar offers. Sometimes, the shamisen can be piercing, but it also gives a real beauty because each time you strike a string, the sound goes right into your heart, so the payoff to the sonic setbacks is emotional. But you can also play rhythmically because it's a drum as well as a stringed instrument. Coming from playing the violin, which isn't a percussive instrument, this is super-exciting."

In addition to prog and their Japanese folk roots, Mitsune's music is informed by a wide variety of different styles.

"I have a background in classical and jazz violin, and I love R&B, soul and hip-hop, as well as progressive rock," says Snell. "But our percussionist, Petros [Tzekos], studied Afro-Cuban hand percussion and is also heavily influenced by the music of Morocco."

The new EP, which is due out in 2024, should really pique the interest of prog fans.

"It's a concept piece and it's made to be listened to as one continuous track," Snell says. "We recorded it live and then added overdubs. It has a mishmash of styles, and it's a bit more experimental and jazzy than our current album. It's also influenced by Arabic music, folk music from the Gulf region, as well as traditional North Japanese music. We can't wait for people to hear it." **SL**

PROG FILE

LINE-UP

Shiomi Kawaguchi *(shamisen, vocals)*, **Youka Snell** *(shamisen, vocals)*, **Tina Kopp** *(shamisen, vocals)*, **Petros Tzekos** *(percussion)*, **Daigo Nakai** *(bass)*

SOUNDS LIKE

King Crimson channelled through traditional Japanese folk with a touch of blues and jazz

CURRENT RELEASE

Hazama is out now via Bandcamp

WEBSITE

mitsune.de

PROG PRESENTS NEW MUSIC
Listen to MITSUNE all this month on PROGZILLA RADIO
progzilla.com/listen/

"Our new EP is heavily influenced by *Close To The Edge*."

Mitsune: Japanese folk crossed with 70s prog? Yes please!

PRESS/SHARI MARKS

FRANCK CARDUCCI

& The Fantastic Squad

"A REALLY TOUGH ACT TO FOLLOW"
STING

"IMAGINATIVE, VARIED AND STRONG"
STEVE HACKETT (GENESIS)

THE EXTRAVAGANZA TOUR

2024

FEB-28 : LONDON
FEB-29 : SWINDON
MAR-01 : PORT TALBOT
MAR-02 : STOURPORT [*FUSION FESTIVAL*]
MAR-03 : SOUTHAMPTON
MAR-06 : LEICESTER
MAR-07 : LIVERPOOL [*CAVERN CLUB*]
MAR-08 : GLASGOW
MAR-09 : NEWCASTLE
MAR-10 : OUNDLE

electric SAVAREZ GRETSCH burning shed run by artists for artists

www.franckcarducci.com

STORM DEVA

The composer-astroscientist duo that are cloudbusting in mythical, eclectic style.

IN HINDUISM, A DEVA (pronounced dayva) is a god; someone supernatural who shines and is literally dev-ine. Add extreme weather, and emotion, and there's a substantial concept manifesting. So when Leeds-via-Hertfordshire composer, vocalist and pianist Carollyn Eden chose this name for her work she was thinking big. Bigger than big. Celestial, magical… as large as the heavens and Earth. Which was serendipitous, as the noted astrophysicist (and progressive-minded rock guitarist) Dr Stuart Clark was soon pulled into her, ahem, orbit.

After a chance conversation at a tube station, Eden was invited to perform at an interactive science-theatre event in 2012 called *Enlightenment Café*. It took place in the Old Vic tunnels at Waterloo, where Clark was a Master Of Ceremonies amid a number of scientists taking part.

"We started talking about music there and stayed in touch," Clark tells *Prog*. "Much later, Carollyn played me some piano music and I immediately recognised it as rock songs waiting to happen. There was a depth of musicality and super-strong melodies; it was everything I liked about progressive music."

Eden's influences had included rock, but she adored "All About Eve, *Watermark* by Enya, and Iona," she says. "I'd listened to *Journey To The Morn* so many times, this is where I was heading."

However, when in her 20s, the band assembled around her didn't fit: "There was soul and pop, and a saxophone!" Eden craved folk and celtic rock flavours but wasn't connected to that world. "I was longing for that, so, years later, this was the perfect meeting with Stu," she says with a nod.

That said, the Storm didn't rage for an age.

"We were trying to find our soundscape," says Clark. "Carollyn's demos were so fully formed that anything you do diminishes what's already there…"

"But I kept saying, 'More rock!' And I'd come up with guitar riffs," laughs Eden.

Writing and arranging together, and becoming a romantic partnership, led to their recently released debut, *Storm Deva*, comprised mainly of Eden's back catalogue. Produced by John Mitchell, whom the pair met via a Space Rocks-initiated online chat during lockdown, Eden's songs are vivid with imagery.

"I was brought up with gothic fairy tales and fantasy such as *Lord Of The Rings* and *The Dark Is Rising*," she says. "The natural world is also my inspiration, and everything that's happened in my life… I went through some incredibly dramatic things in the last 10 years and I've had inner demons to cope with. My songs are about growing as a person."

"I've always loved great lyrics and really enjoyed the storytelling aspect of writers like Neil Peart, or Iron Maiden," says Clark. "That's what we imagine for Storm Deva; hear our music, be swept along by us."

Another influence is Loreena McKennitt — and *Storm Deva* benefits from the presence of McKennitt's superstar drummer Rob Brian.

"He came to our first Zoom meeting with a pad full of notes," Eden enthuses. "He wanted to really craft his parts and connect with us."

"It's a dream, really," says Clark. "And now we have the bit between our teeth, in the next year we'll have the second album out and the five-piece who recorded it on the road." **JK**

PROG FILE

LINE-UP

Carollyn Eden *(keyboard, vocals),* **Stuart Clark** *(guitars)*

SOUNDS LIKE

Piano-led classical, theatrical and folk styles with soaring prog guitar accents

CURRENT RELEASE

Storm Deva is out now via Bandcamp

WEBSITE

www.stormdeva.com

PROG PRESENTS NEW MUSIC Listen to STORM DEVA all this month on PROGZILLA RADIO progzilla.com/listen/

"I've always loved great lyrics and the storytelling aspect of writers like Neil Peart, or Iron Maiden."

A magical pairing: Eden and Clark.

PRESS/CJANSENPHOTOGRAPHY.COM

Q&A

MATT BERRY

Musical polymath and actor details his collaborative album with KPM and happy conversations with Jean-Michel Jarre and Keith Mansfield.

Words: Jo Kendall **Portrait:** Ben Meadows

An initial obvious link between library music and the progressive rock world is when Van der Graaf Generator covered Sir George Martin's *Theme One* — an epic psychedelic fanfare allied to BBC Radio 1 — as a single in 1972, notably used by the late Tommy Vance for the *Friday Rock Show*'s *Friday Night Connection* slot. Over the last decade, Matt Berry has regularly referenced the composition and production of 60s and 70s theme songs and sound beds in his own work, such as on 2018's *Television Themes*. Finally he's made a record, *Simplicity*, in collaboration with the British library label KPM — and he couldn't be happier.

How did you get into library music?
Through watching television as a kid in the mid-70s. Library music was used for sport, current affairs, everything, because apart from the Radiophonic Workshop, there wasn't a BBC outfit for coming up with TV themes. Library music was used quite creatively sometimes and quite bizarrely in other cases. But the library material was always excellent quality and really well put together with great influences, whether it was big band, jazz, soul, funk, rock, pop… you can hear it in all of those 60s, 70s and early 80s records on labels such as KPM, Bruton and De Wolfe.

It's interesting to think that the theme from *Grandstand*, say, was selected from library music.
It could have been used for a quiz show and it would still fit. Something up-tempo would be for sport or a quiz, a march would be for news or a documentary. Then you'd get something silly that would be used on sitcoms, such as *Terry And June*. A bizarre choice is *Holy Mackerel!* by Brian Bennett. That would have been intended for comedy but for some unknown reason was picked for *Rugby Special*.

"Production is 50 per cent of the atmosphere of a record, and I have to get it right."

In the 90s, a thirst for nostalgia in the UK ran parallel to Britpop and that's when albums from the KPM — Keith-Prowse-Maurice — Music Group library became sought after.
I collected quite a few and the music — mostly instrumental — fascinated me. Martin Green had done a lot of crate-digging for the compilation *The Sound Gallery*, and that highlighted TV themes and adverts too. I loved the compositions and the playing… I have to also give credit to Chris Evans and Danny Baker, who were playing this music on their radio shows at the time, creating interest in tracks you hadn't heard since you were a kid, and in the people who made them.

How did the partnership with KPM come about?
I've talked about KPM over the years, and then I was invited to an event that was a Q&A with [composer] Keith Mansfield. I had to go! While I was there, Jack Lewis [KPM VP and A&R] grabbed me and said, "I'd love you to do something, if you have time and are interested." I was like, "Of course!" [laughs]. Before I knew it, it was finished, strings and brass were added and it was pressed onto KPM [signature] green vinyl. A digital release wouldn't have been anywhere near the event it is for me. The whole point is to have the 12-inch, because that's how we were introduced to these records.

What did you like about KPM's music specifically?
The compositions are very melodic, and the top line was really important. *Grandstand* is probably the best example, the top line is using piccolo and the xylophone. I spoke to Keith Mansfield about this for quite some time — and for other people this might have been the most boring conversation [laughs]. This was his technique and I applied it to my recordings. I recorded all the parts except for drums, which came from Craig Blundell, then KPM added real brass and strings from their studio in Los Angeles.

That top line is very apparent in your lead track, *Top Brass*. The titles were also important, being super-descriptive.
It's exactly as if you'd been asked to come up with something for any type of show. So that's what I was sort of thinking about when I was putting these things together, what would work? I want these recordings to actually be used, so they have to fit a picture. *Driving Seat*, for example, is written to be a theme.

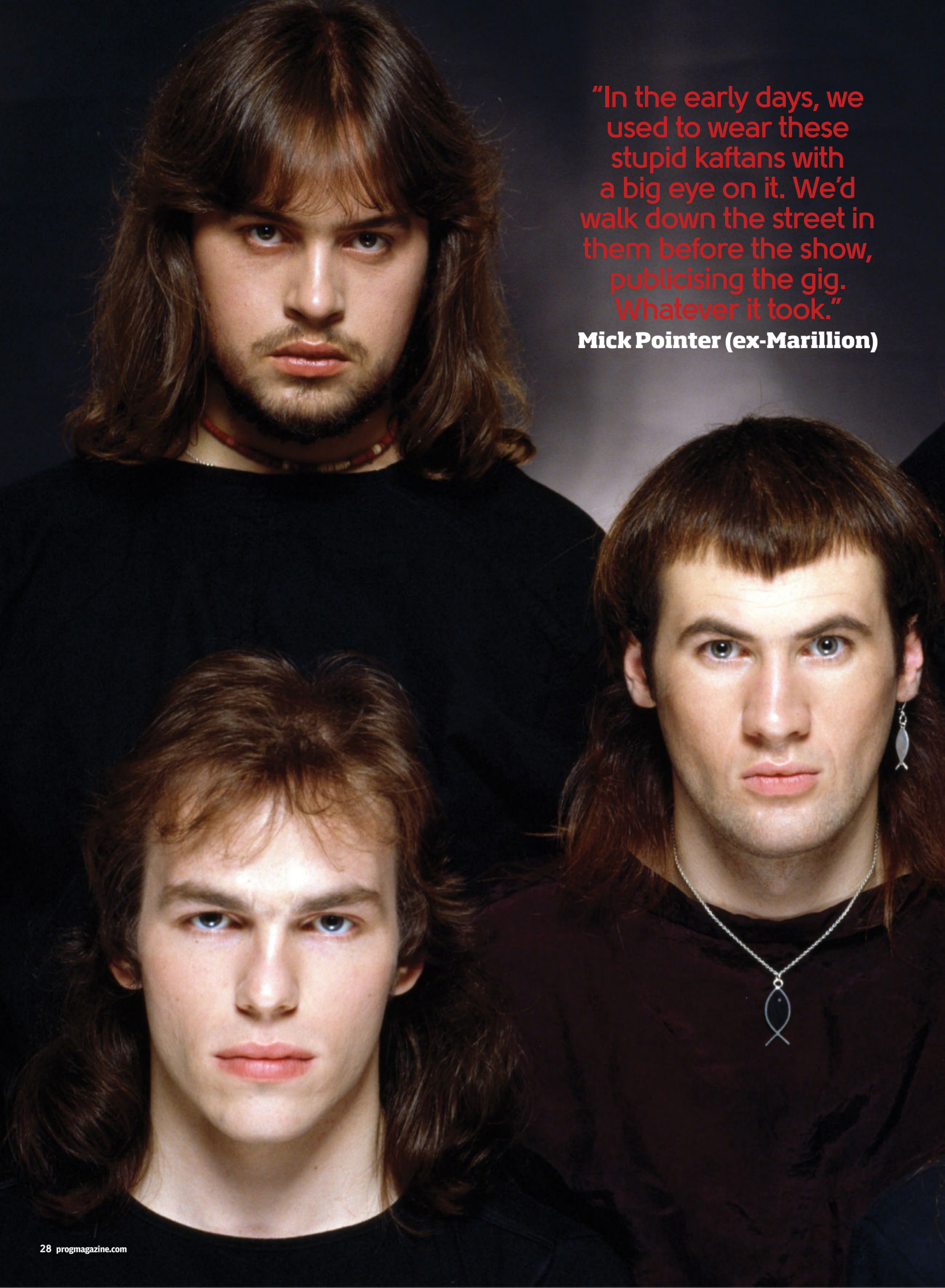
That's a late-70s kind of Deep Purple tune, becoming Jean-Michel Jarre by the end!
I didn't use any instruments that had been manufactured after 1980, but vintage analogue gear to sound like the tracks that they're trying to evoke. I was also referring to the Herbie Flowers and Barry Morgan recordings for KPM; incredible Fender bass and that dry drum kit. Production is 50 per cent of the atmosphere of a record, and I have to get it right.

***Set The Scene* recalls the rare KPM record *Brazilian Suite* by Rogerio Duprat. You like some Latin percussion, don't you?**
It's always worthwhile giving a few bars of just percussion so it can be looped and put against the things where there's a lot of talking. It gives me an excuse to get a tambourine and woodblocks out, which is always really good fun to do and adds a human element.

That's alongside your two psychedelic production favourites, flange and phase.
That's right, I flange on the drums and phase on the keyboards. Then I have plate reverb and spring reverb too; these create something a bit eerie.

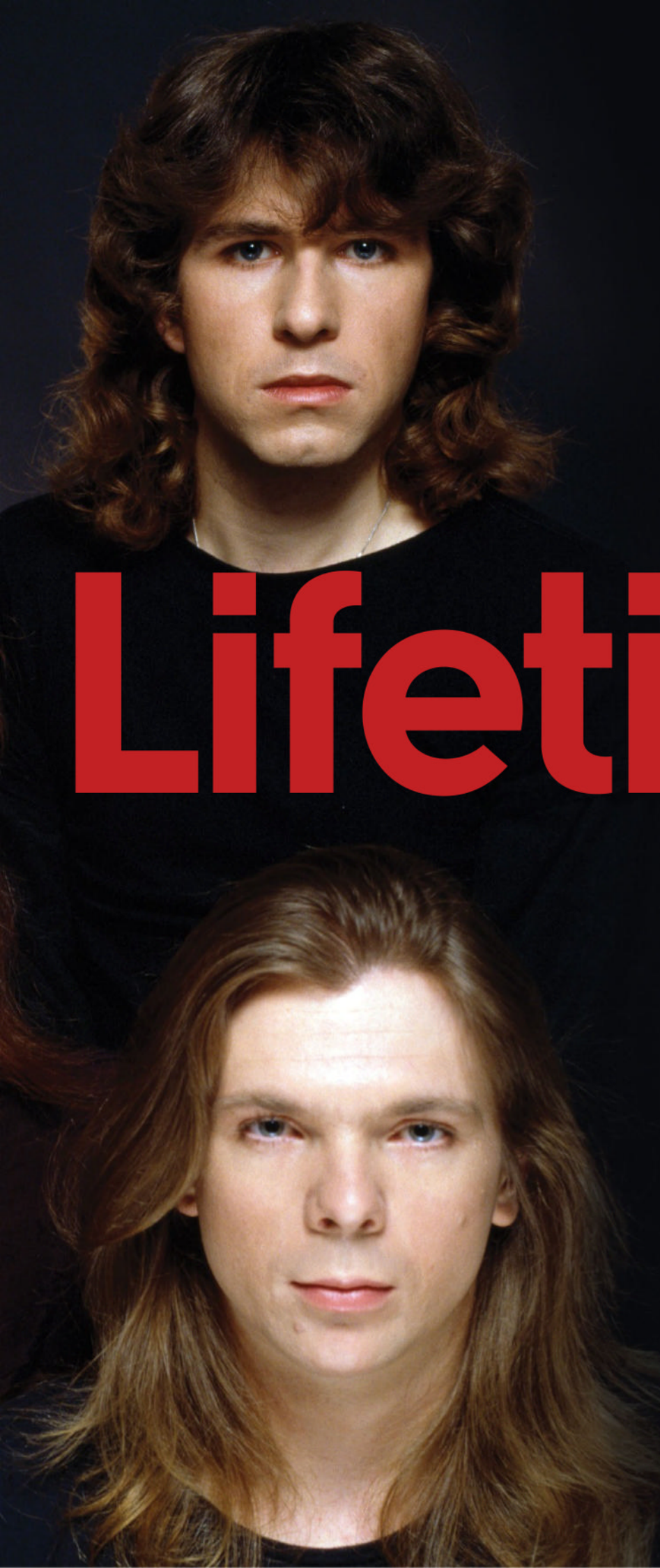
KPM might not be so well known for prog compositions but Curved Air's Francis Monkman and White Noise's David Vorhaus also have catalogue releases.
David Vorhaus' *Sea Of Tranquillity* is one of the best KPM recordings, and one of the best electronic recordings ever. Not to name drop, but I spoke about this piece with Jean-Michel Jarre, who's a huge fan of it. The kind of basic analogue sequencing that Vorhaus does on that was such a massive influence for so many people. It's funny, because it appeared on adverts for things like Radion — like hearing *Oxygène*, but used on ads. It was never celebrated in its own right, but *Sea Of Tranquillity* is up there with some of the most important electronic music created, and to do that as part of a library catalogue is incredibly impressive.

Simplicity is out now via Acid Jazz. See thematthberry.co.uk for more.



"In the early days, we used to wear these stupid kaftans with a big eye on it. We'd walk down the street in them before the show, publicising the gig. Whatever it took."

Mick Pointer (ex-Marillion)



By the early 80s, much of the British music press had turned their backs on prog, dismissing it as old-fashioned and out of touch with the youth of the day. But in the UK's shires a grassroots scene was beginning to grow, spearheaded by **Marillion**, whose successful debut album *Script For A Jester's Tear* paved the way for a sound inspired by the 70s classics but infused with modern pop hooks and poetic lyrics. Members of **Pendragon**, **Pallas**, **IQ**, **Solstice** and more share the story behind the rise (and fall) of a movement that would set prog on a new path.

Words: Dave Everley **Portrait:** Simon Fowler

Once In A Lifetime

All things must pass, and prog's imperial early-to-mid-70s phase was no exception. By the end of that decade, many of its chief protagonists were either seemingly spent as creative forces (ELP, Yes), about to undergo radical transformations (Genesis, Yes again) or absent (King Crimson, albeit temporarily). The upstarts of punk may have been commercial minnows in comparison, but their jibes about 'dinosaurs' hit where it hurt.

Yet as the 80s got underway, something unexpected was happening. Across the United Kingdom, a wave of grassroots bands set about reviving this seemingly moribund genre. A scene was emerging, largely away from the bright lights and music industry back-slapping of London. It was centred around the likes of Aylesbury's Marillion (née Silmarillion) and space cadets Solstice, Twelfth Night (who began life as an instrumental band at Reading University), Pallas from Aberdeen, Pendragon (originally Zeus Pendragon) from Stroud and Portsmouth's IQ (formed from the ashes of The Lens). Their ranks were swollen by countless other like-minded outfits: Chemical Alice (whose keyboard player Mark Kelly would join Marillion, and other members would go on to form Tamarisk), Trilogy, Haze, Airbridge, Liaison, Citizen Cain and others.

As the decade progressed, these bands would channel the DIY spirit of punk to create a vibrant homegrown scene, populated by a handful of larger-than-life characters and soundtracked by albums that wore their love of a then-unfashionable musical style openly. One band — Marillion — would go on to much bigger things, but others would have their own individual and collective successes, not least in keeping the progressive rock flame flickering.

Unlike earlier scenes that had been centred around specific locales, the new prog bands initially operated in isolation in towns and cities across the country, largely unaware of each other.

Mick Pointer: "Silmarillion played our one and only show at a pub in Southall [west London] called The Hamborough Tavern. We had a big fallout with the guitarist and keyboard player over a fucking Mellotron, would you believe? We started gigging as Marillion pretty bloody quickly afterwards. You have to get yourself out there in front of a whole lot of people."

Nick Barrett: "We played Redditch College and the agricultural college in Cirencester. We got booed off at most places. At one gig, the rugby team tried to drive a car into the venue and then got onstage and started hassling us."

Andy Glass: "I'd played with Mick Pointer in a band called Electric Gypsy. As soon as Marillion started getting gigs, they were like, 'Do you want to come and play with us?'"

Brian Devoil: "There were a couple of pubs in Bicester where we played, a couple of places in Oxford, and the Target in Reading, which was our local pub."

Mike Holmes: "When we started IQ in Southampton, we wanted to do any kind of music we wanted to. We had a funk track, a reggae track, but it became really obvious very early on that what we were really good at was prog."

Paul McMahon: "We were basically a school band when we started out [in 1978]. The ambition was to do original music. We'd no idea that prog music was going to have any kind of resurgence."

Dramatis Personae (in order of appearance)

MICK POINTER
Marillion co-founder and drummer 1979-83
NICK BARRETT
Pendragon founder and guitarist/singer
ANDY GLASS
Solstice founder and guitarist
BRIAN DEVOIL
Twelfth Night founder and drummer
MIKE HOLMES
IQ guitarist
PAUL MCMAHON
Haze founder, guitarist and vocalist
GRAEME MURRAY
Pallas founder and bassist
NIK SZYMANEK
Trilogy drummer
ED PERCIVAL
Airbridge guitarist, keyboardist and vocalist
ANDY GRANT
Chemical Alice/Tamarisk
FISH
Former Marillion singer and solo artist
ROGER MORGAN
Afterglow fanzine co-editor
KEITH TURNER
Quasar founder and bassist
NIGEL HUTCHINGS
General manager/ booking manager, The Marquee
STEPHANIE BRADLEY
Prog fan/ Marquee attendee
PETE HINTON
Elusive Records A&R manager
STU NICHOLSON
Galahad singer

> "We played The Ruskin Arms in east London, which is where Iron Maiden played a lot. We used to wear kimonos onstage. Was it a rip-off of Rush? Yeah, of course it was."
>
> **Nik Szymanek (Trilogy)**

The bands did joint tours to spread the word of prog.

Trilogy's first Ruskin Arms gig, November 1981. No kimonos yet, though...

TICKET FLYERS THROUGHOUT ARTICLE TRILOGY AND PENDRAGON ARCHIVES

Graeme Murray: "Glasgow really seemed to take to the whole prog thing. There was a venue on Sauchiehall Street; we used to play there on a Saturday, a lunchtime show, an evening show and a late show, and the place would be packed out the door."

Nik Szymanek: "We played The Ruskin Arms in east London, which is where Iron Maiden played a lot. We used to wear kimonos onstage. Was it a rip-off of Rush? Yeah, of course it was."

Ed Percival: "These days, you can do a tribute band. Back then, it wasn't a thing you did. You wrote your own songs, because that's what music was all about. It was about you creating something new."

Andy Grant: "With Chemical Alice, we were so young. The only ambition was to play live and try and get a recording, just to see if we could get people to come and look at us."

There was excitement in the air, both musically and visually. Marillion, Pallas and Twelfth Night imbued their musical experiments with an electric 80s energy, complementing it with visuals that drew on the grand theatrical tradition of Peter Gabriel and Peter Hammill.

Mick Pointer: "The early Marillion stuff was going down more of a hippie route. It needed a kick up the arse. Then Derek Dick [aka Fish, who joined in January 1981] turned up with a book of lyrics and started looking at the material we had. That's when things started taking shape."

Andy Glass: "Fish was incredibly charismatic. Who doesn't love a showman?"

Mick Pointer: "In the early days, we used to wear these fucking stupid kaftans with a big eye on it. We'd walk down the street in them before the show, publicising the gig. Whatever it took."

Fish: "There were a lot of what you might call 'refugees' from the styles that were around at the time. They weren't Clash fans, they weren't Police fans. They wanted a bit more. They were looking for something that was prog."

Brian Devoil: "I remember seeing Marillion in the Target and they got a bit of stick from our fans because basically they weren't as good as we were at that time. I remember making some comment that it was because our fans were used to the real thing."

PRESS/TRILOGY ARCHIVES

Mick Pointer: "Marillion were an exciting band, we were putting on a show. There's no doubt about it, Derek Dick was a really great frontman."

Fish: "There was a kind of a punk thing with the band in those early performances. There was a bit of spit and venom. It might have been all clever-clever-proggy music wise, but the delivery had a lot more attack."

Roger Morgan: "*Afterglow* had started off as a Genesis fanzine before we took it over. Then somebody sent in a tape of this band Marillion, with a photograph. The guy singing sounded a bit like Peter Gabriel, but they looked and sounded interesting."

Brian Devoil: "We didn't have any particular aspirations. The ambition was just to see where it took us. It wasn't until Geoff Mann joined properly at the end of 1981 that we started taking things seriously. Geoff wasn't a fantastic singer. Neither was Fish or Euan Lowson from Pallas. But they had presence."

Nick Barrett: "Initially, Geoff Mann wasn't very popular. We did a gig with Twelfth Night and Dagaband at the Venue in London, and he kind of grated with the audience. But they went off and played more gigs, and he honed his craft and just turned it around. People loved him."

Graeme Murray: "Euan liked to delve into the outrageous. He had a big, theatrical performance in the song *The Ripper*, where he had a white forensic-police boiler suit on, his face was covered in dark paint. He'd be completely wired. There were times when he came offstage and the rest of us would look at each other and go, 'Holy fuck, what was that?'"

Roger Morgan: "Geoff Mann was doing a lot of theatrics and Fish was doing his thing. If you didn't have a theatrical performer, you were a bit behind the times."

Bands began to venture further and further afield, taking things from a local to a national level. In 1982, Pallas and Marillion teamed up for a joint tour of Scotland, proving there was a wider market for what they were doing.

Mike Holmes: "We'd read about bands like Twelfth Night, Pendragon, Pallas and Marillion in the press. Not even in big features, just in the gig guide."

Roger Morgan: "Once we'd featured Marillion in the fanzine, people got in touch with us, saying, 'Maybe

That's a wrap! Twelfth Night's Geoff Mann performing *Creepshow* onstage in June 1983.

PRESS/TWELFTH NIGHT ARCHIVES/MARK HUGHES

you'd like to feature our band?' They'd send us tapes and photographs. And that's when we turned it from a Genesis fanzine into a prog fanzine."

Nick Barrett: "We supported Marillion at Gloucester Leisure Centre [in August 1982]. Our manager said, 'You've got to wait for them to soundcheck, don't piss them off.' I remember pressing the button to get in the lift and the doors opened and there was this big guy with the remnants of greasepaint on his face, pushing this Mellotron. I said, 'Have you got room for another in there?' And he went [aggressive Scottish accent] 'No.' And the doors closed."

Andy Grant: "Mark Kelly was the keyboard player in Chemical Alice. Marillion played with us, and they asked him to join that night. He told me. I said, 'You should take it.' They were streets ahead of everyone else."

Graeme Murray: "I remember one time, Marillion and us going down to Canterbury to play a co-headliner at an arts school. Marillion set up at one end of the hall and we set up at the other end of the hall, and nobody came. It was very *Spinal Tap*."

Nick Barrett: "I was working. I was milking cows. Literally. We'd play a gig, drive back and I'd go straight to the farm and start milking cows at 6am."

Mike Holmes: "We tried to get A&R people to Southampton, but they really weren't interested. Eventually, we figured the only way we'd get a toe in the water was by moving to London. So we ended up all living in this flat in Kensal Rise, on the dole. We'd make these massive stews that would last the week. It was basically [80s sitcom] *The Young Ones*, right down to the dead mouse in the toaster."

Keith Turner: "I began to notice something was happening because other bands would play at the same places. Not at the same time, but you'd see that they'd been there. The Heathery Bar in Wishaw [Scotland] — we played there, IQ played there, Pendragon played there, Solstice played there."

Mike Holmes: "There was no meeting of prog bands: 'Right lads, let's do this.' But it was clear that a lot of people were like-minded. They had the same vision for their bands as we did."

The same DIY spirit that had fuelled punk and the New Wave Of British Heavy Metal a few years earlier underpinned this grassroots prog scene. A steady stream of cassette-tape demos emerged, which were advertised in the back of newspapers and sold at gigs. Among them were Twelfth Night's *The First Tape Album* (1980), Pallas' *Arrive Alive* (1981) and IQ's *Seven Stories Into Eight* (1982).

PRESS/PALLAS ARCHIVES/MIKE BENTLEY

Pallas arrive alive on the new prog scene.

"When we supported Marillion in Gloucester, Mick Pointer came backstage and said to come play a gig with them at the Marquee. We'd never heard of it. We came from Stroud. I know the names of the farms, but not the clubs."

Nick Barrett (Pendragon)

Brian Devoil: "We could go and play in a pub in Bicester and get paid £30, but if we took along a tape we'd recorded and some badges and few posters and T-shirts, we could make just as much in merchandise."

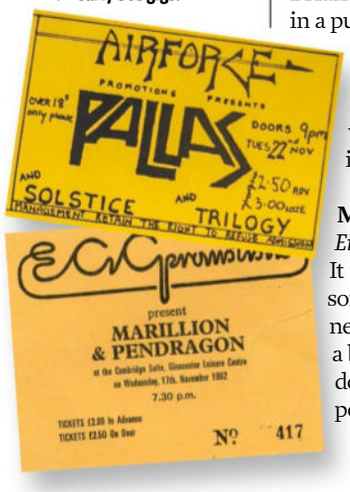
Mike Holmes: "*Seven Stories Into Eight* was our first proper tape. It was done very cheaply. We did some of it in the flat. One of our neighbours, Nancy, had ears like a bat, so we had to keep stuff down to a minimum. At one point, I remember somebody singing under a bean bag so they could keep the noise down."

Paul McMahon: "In 1982, we released a self-funded cassette that we'd done on a portastudio in the cellar of the house, called *The Cellar Tapes*. It was two quid a copy and sold bucketloads. It subsidised the live gigs."

Nick Barrett: "Everyone was going, 'Do you sell tapes?' And we thought. 'Well, we should start doing this, because it could finance the gigs.' So we did *The Excalibur Tape* and *The Alaska Tape*."

Ed Percival: "We recorded our album, *Paradise Moves*, incredibly early, at the beginning of 1981, before any other band in the scene. Then our record company sat on it for a year or 18 months. By the time it came out, we were followers not leaders, which really pissed us off."

Bands standing together for more early 80s gigs.



Nick Barrett and Pendragon at The Barge Semington, an actual barge moored in Gloucester docks, around 1981.

PRESS/PENDRAGON ARCHIVES

Keith Turner: "Our keyboard player had a little eight-track studio – it was very basic. We did [1982 debut album] *Fire In The Sky* there in downtime, whenever it wasn't being used. When I look at all the equipment I have now, I wonder how I could have possibly done it."

Nick Barrett: "I listened to other bands' tapes. They were terrible, apart from one, which was from a band called IQ. I thought, 'This is the kind of prog that I like.' They were good at what they did."

Mike Holmes: "We didn't go to Charterhouse. We came from council estates in Southampton. We never had any money. It was all handmade. It had that do-it-yourself edge."

The *Afterglow* fanzine covered the burgeoning prog scene in depth, and all for just 40p!

Brian Devoil: "We were the first band of that era to do a vinyl record, *Live At The Target*, which we recorded at The Target in Reading. I worked out that if we charged £1 for the gig ticket, and got 200 people in both nights, that would be enough to pay for an eight-track recording machine. I ended up getting that album pressed by a guy who did stuff for CBS. Most people hadn't picked up on the idea that it was quite easy to make vinyl."

This nascent prog scene soon developed an epicentre: fabled London sweatbox The Marquee Club, located on Wardour Street in the middle of Soho. Two people involved in the club did more than most to help nurture this scene: general manager and chief booker Nigel Hutchings, and legendary press agent Keith Goodwin, who had his offices nearby.

Mick Pointer: "Keith had been around a while and had met every conceivable arsehole, and so he was very jaded by the music industry. But he was very enthusiastic about us at the same time."

Mike Holmes: "Keith Goodwin, bless him. We heard that he would be able to get you into the press and everything. So we eventually paid him 40 quid a week. We had to go out busking – literally busking on the tube – to get this money. [Comedian] Roy Hudd gave us 50p once."

Nigel Hutchings: "The first time I noticed Marillion was when they somehow got a gig supporting [glam rock band] Girl. I'd never heard of them. I was standing in the bar with a manager mate of mine, John Arnison, whose office was just across the road in Wardour Street, and one or two coachloads of supporters started tipping through the door. They'd brought people down from Aylesbury with them. And then the band came on: 'Fuck me, these guys are really good.' John Arnison was knocked out by them. He went on to manage them."

Nick Barrett: "When we supported Marillion in Gloucester, Mick Pointer came backstage and said to come play a gig with them at the Marquee. We'd never heard of it. We came from Stroud. I know the names of the farms, but not the clubs."

Mike Holmes: "The Marquee became the spiritual home for what was happening."

Words and picture: Airbridge in 1981.

PRESS/AIRBRIDGE ARCHIVES/ED PERCIVAL

I Was A Teenage Fanzine Editor

Prog's Editor, Jerry Ewing, recalls his time at the helm of his very own 80s prog 'zine.

I started my own prog rock fanzine, *Court Jester* (I know, how apt!), in early 1983. I'd been to see Marillion at a couple of their now legendary Christmas Marquee shows in 1982, at which point I'd also discovered Solstice and Pendragon and, for me, as a 16-year-old rock fan who was just beginning to discover a whole new world of progressive rock, it was fascinating time full of wide-eyed wonder and discovery. I'd picked up a copy of Marillion's newsletter, *The Web*, and read it on the train back home to Chorleywood. I remember my overriding thought being: "I could do something like this..."

At that point my knowledge of fanzines was quite limited. I knew about *Hawkfan* and a couple of Yes ones, but later I'd discover *Afterglow*, the pinnacle of the 80s prog 'zines to my mind, and a rapidly growing number of like-minded fanzines. I cobbled together a few reviews – the Marillion dates, obviously; Asia at Wembley Arena; Pendragon's *Victims Of Life* cassette – traced the jester character from the cover of Le Mat's *The Waltz Of The Fool* album and purchased lots of packets of Old English Letraset from WH Smith in Rickmansworth. My dad printed a few copies off on the photocopier at his work, I took an ad on the 'Fanzine' section of *Sounds* magazine's classified section and off we went. The first run sold out within a week.

Court Jester ran for about seven issues, until I went to university, and ended up selling a couple of thousand copies per issue. By that time I knew many of the bands that I wrote about – I had regular Sunday afternoon phone conversations with Nick Barrett, Brian Devoil or Martin Orford catching up on the gossip. The Marquee was central, not just to the bands playing but the entire scene. Early on I'd sell copies of the fanzine to people in the queue for gigs. Later the bands would kindly sell copies on their merch stands at gigs.

I largely remember it as a fascinating time of learning, both about music and the writing and creating of an entire fanzine. I started out on my late mum's old Olivetti typewriter. Desktop publishing was still half a decade away! I met some great people during that time. Some, like Stephanie Bradley, I'm still in touch with. Others, such as old schoolmate Rick Cook and our artist/designer par excellence, Chris Dignan, I've unfortunately long lost touch with. But I sometimes look at the last issue we did, at a review of a band called Karma, featuring a guy called Steven Wilson, and smile about where we both ended up. **JE**

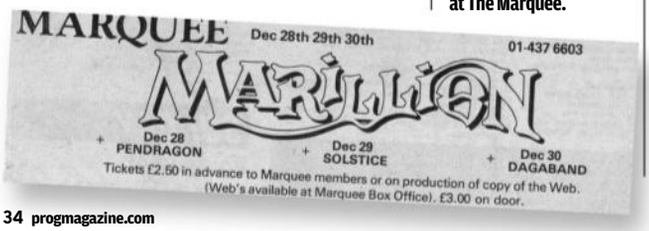
"We'd just done *The Wake* and it had a really great reception in the *Melody Maker*; it even got into the main charts in the 70s. I remember unloading the van at one gig and thinking, 'This is a good time, I should pinpoint this in my mind and remember it.'"

Mike Holmes (IQ)

AVALON/PAUL COX

Graeme Murray: "I remember driving our bus down from Aberdeen and parking it up in the lane at the back of the Marquee, and there were just queues right the way down Wardour Street. We were going, 'Oh my fucking God, this is happening.'"

Nigel Hutchings: "Marillion were part of the fabric of the club over a two-year period. They'd be in the club all the time. And Fish was in my face all the time about getting more gigs."



An ad for Marillion at The Marquee.

Stephanie Bradley: "It seemed that almost every week at least someone you wanted to see was playing, and bands played two-, three-, even four-night residencies, so you got to be there a lot! I think I spent 17 consecutive nights there in summer '84."

Mike Holmes: "We used to go in and pester Nigel to see if we could get a booking. Finally, after what seemed like years, we got our first support slot."

Andy Glass: "We got our own headline shows there. The audience was all late teens, early 20s, and they had this energy. The passion that people had was extraordinary. They would be going nuts. "

Mike Holmes: "We used to get stage invasions towards the end of our gigs."

Nick Barrett: "The Marquee was the turning point. Suddenly, there were hundreds of people falling over themselves to get tickets."

Fish: "I didn't give a fuck about any movement. The only flag I was holding had 'Marillion' on it. I wasn't interested in Twelfth Night, Solstice or whoever: 'Yeah, progressive rock, we're coming out of the woodwork.' It was bollocks."

The buzz surrounding Marillion's many appearances at The Marquee didn't go unnoticed. Unsurprisingly, they began to be courted by record labels, eventually signing with EMI.

Brian Devoil: "It was during the recording of [Twelfth Night's 1982 debut studio album] *Fact And Fiction* that things started happening for Marillion. They were having some success with their straight down the line, Genesis-like material. We realised we didn't need to try to be so commercial. We could be a little bit more true to our progressive roots."

Graeme Murray: "We were always looking to write something that would get radio airplay. The target was always a commercial breakthrough. That's where the song *Arrive Alive* came from. It felt like we were experimenting with hard rock with prog elements."

NIGEL HUTCHINGS

PRESS/PALLAS ARCHIVES/MIKE BENTLEY

PRESS/QUASAR ARCHIVES

PRESS/SOLSTICE ARCHIVES/ROBIN WILLCOCKS

Icons in action: Pallas, Quasar and Solstice strut their stuff at The Marquee.

Nick Barrett: "We accepted that Marillion were way ahead of us. Nobody could touch them. There were bands who came out who thought they were as good as Marillion, but they just were not."

Brian Devoil: "This is going to sound awful, but if I'd wanted to listen to Genesis, I'd listen to Genesis rather than Marillion. If I wanted to listen to Yes… well, I wouldn't want to listen to Yes particularly anyway."

Andy Glass: "We were kind of bitchy about Marillion, as well as a whole raft of other bands who appeared around that time. They were our mates – but also, as far as we were concerned, they were doing early Genesis, except not that well. Mind you, our own singer [Sandy Leigh] sounded like Jon Anderson, so who am I to talk?"

Keith Turner: "There were some bands who were unpleasantly competitive, let's put it that way. And there were some bands who were happy to push a movement."

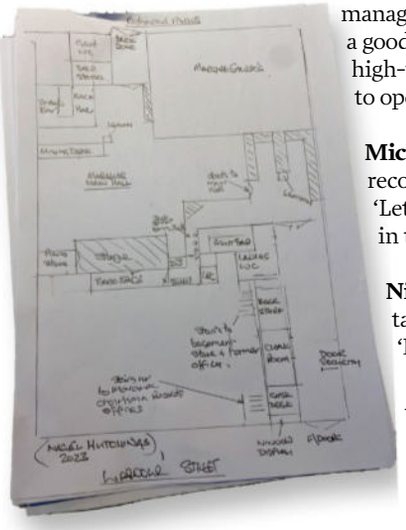
Andy Glass: "Pendragon were a band we really got on with. Pallas we got on with, but fuck me, they had an attitude. They thought they were the best ever. I mean they *were* really good – their musicianship was second to none, but fuck me, did they know it."

Graeme Murray: "The more recognition we got, there were a number of fans that would drift towards us and a number of fans that would drift towards other bands, and it became a bit more competitive."

Mike Holmes: "Prog was mostly a dirty word in the music press. It was far too easy to make snide comments about it."

Brian Devoil: "The *NME* always hated us. One of their guys came to our show and wrote that one of our tracks was so long that his cardigan went in and out of fashion three times, which was a great line. It wouldn't have sat well with us to be liked by the *NME*."

Nigel Hutchings' sketch of the Marquee's floorplan.



Marillion were the first band from this scene to release an album on a major label. *Script For A Jester's Tear* came out in March 1983 and landed at No.7 in the UK Top 10 – proof that something exciting was happening.

Graeme Murray: "After Marillion got signed to EMI, then there was a stampede for all the other prog bands. It was, 'Hey guys, EMI are signing the prog bands.' A guy who was helping us out with management, Harry Maloney, he had a good relationship with some of the high-ups in EMI, and he managed to open quite a few doors for us."

Mick Pointer: "It was typical of record labels. They were thinking, 'Let's find every other prog band in the country and sign them.'"

Nick Barrett: "We sent our tapes to labels. They all said, 'Piss off.'"

Andy Glass: "We went in to meet Carrere. We used to

break up the longer pieces in the live set with a few party things – little jigs and silly stuff. This label boss said, 'You and Mark, the fiddle player, I want you to wear Stetsons and do a hoe-down thing.' We went, 'See you later.'"

Mike Holmes: "After they signed Marillion, EMI seemed to want to dip their toes into other bands. There were one or two snifters, but nothing serious."

Brian Devoil: "Record companies weren't interested. They just didn't get Geoff. They didn't think he was a commercial prospect. Perhaps some intuitive A&R person may have thought, 'This guy may be fronting a rock band, but he's actually a Christian and he doesn't want to be a rock star.' Who knows?"

In August 1983, Pendragon, Pallas, Solstice, Twelfth Night and Marillion all appeared at the three-day Reading Festival, with Fish and co second on the bill below Saturday night headliners Black Sabbath. It was a weekend-long coronation for prog's young princelings.

Brian Devoil: "We'd become the first local band to play the Reading Festival, in 1981. Geoff had only joined the band the week before. He came out in this First World War army uniform and started haranguing the audience: 'You scruffy 'ooligans!' They loved it."

Mick Pointer: "We played Reading for the first time in 1982. We were shitting ourselves, but we played pretty well. It was a pivotal gig for us. It put us in another league."

Graeme Murray: "Reading '83 felt special. Everybody felt like something was finally happening for this music."

Nick Barrett: "I'd seen bands get absolutely pelted with bottles and cans. We approached the ramp of the stage totally and utterly terrified. But we didn't get a single thing thrown at us. It went down really well."

Graeme Murray: "A huge Scottish contingent had come down. When we walked onstage, there were dozens and dozens of Scottish flags. And we went to open with our first track, and Neil's guitar amp blew up. But we were pleased with the gig."

Nick Barrett: "Twelfth Night were prancing around like poodles backstage, and I say that in a very loving way. They went onstage and they were incredible. They could do no wrong."

FISH BACKSTAGE, ONSTAGE/TWELFTH NIGHT PHOTOS: AFTERGLOW ARCHIVES/ROGER MORGAN

Top: Twelfth Night at Reading '83. Above: Nick Barrett and Fish backstage.

Mike Holmes: "I don't know why we weren't on the bill that year. We obviously weren't in with the right people. It was very disappointing. Of course it was."

Mick Pointer: "The problem for me is that I was sacked a few months after *Script*.... Those bunch of cunts decided to rubbish me in the press. Stupidly, I didn't register the name 'Marillion' as a copyright because I was naïve. It took me a fucking long time to be proud of that record."

This new prog movement had the wind in its sails. Pallas, Solstice and Trilogy joined forces for the Brave New World tour in November 1983, while IQ opened for Wishbone Ash. By the end of 1984, a string of albums had been released that defined the scene: Marillion's *Fugazi*, Twelfth Night's *Live And Let Live* and *Art And Illusion*, IQ's *Tales From The Lush Attic*, Pallas' *The Sentinel*, Solstice's *Silent Dance* and Pendragon's *Fly High, Fall Far* mini-album.

Brian Devoil: "It was very soon after Reading that Geoff mentioned he wanted to leave. He wanted to do more of his own material, he wanted his lyrics to reflect his Christian beliefs more. We recorded Geoff's farewell gigs at The Marquee in November 1983 and released them as *Live And Let Live*. The shows were incredibly emotional."

Mike Holmes: "When we did *Tales From The Lush Attic*, we saw this deal in the back of *Melody Maker* that said, 'Five days in the studio plus 1,000 vinyl albums for £1,500.' That's pretty much all we could afford. We had four days to record it and one to mix it, so it was very rushed. What we didn't realise was that the price didn't include the covers. We had to pay for them on top. We did a show at the Marquee to promote it – we had the albums but not the covers. But it sold out in about three weeks."

Graeme Murray: "We worked with [former Yes/ELP producer] Eddy Offord on *The Sentinel*. He was a complete nutcase, but lovely. But we were never happy with the way it sounded because we knew that in the studio it was more exciting and had far more of an edge."

Pete Hinton: "John Arnison set up Elusive, and asked me to run it. It wasn't set up as a specific prog label, but he really wanted to get involved with Pendragon."

Nick Barrett: "We recorded [1984's debut mini-album] *Fly High, Fall Far* at

Reading 1983 ticket ad.

Fish hard at work at Reading.

Pallas brought their own fireworks to the show.

PRESS/PALLAS ARCHIVES/MIKE BENTLEY

[Status Quo guitarist] Rick Parfitt's studio in Surrey. Pete Hinton produced it, with a guy named Will Reid-Dick engineering. It was an incredible experience."

Pete Hinton: "I'm not too sure I performed very well with [Pendragon]. They certainly didn't like the mixes that we did and remixed it, and I didn't like their remix. Having said that, me and Nick are great friends today. We made up."

Andy Glass: "*Silent Dance* was a long time coming — it was four years in. We signed a little publishing deal and got 1,500 quid upfront. We booked two weeks in a studio in Cornwall with Nigel Mazlyn-Jones, who had supported Camel and Barclay James Harvest. We just wanted a great recording of how the band sounded live, good performances, a nice mix. Nigel had other ideas. By the end of two weeks, we'd got the drums recorded, and that was it. Nine months, it took in the end."

Brian Devoil: "Geoff had been helping us with the audition tapes for his replacement. Andy Sears [who replaced Mann for the *Art And Illusion* album] had actually been in the audience for one of Geoff's farewell shows."

> "Reading '83 felt special. Everybody felt like something was finally happening for this music."
> **Graeme Murray (Pallas)**

Graeme Murray: "We got a front cover of *Sounds* magazine around the time of *The Sentinel*. We were still using the farm as a studio, and Euan [Lowson, vocalist] managed to borrow some army fatigues from the local marine base [and found a] Russian hat. The fact that a band from Aberdeen was on the front page of *Sounds* made quite an impression. We felt that things were happening for us."

The torrent of releases didn't stop through 1985. IQ released their second album, *The Wake*; Pendragon put out their full-length debut, *The Jewel*, and a compilation album, *Fire In Harmony*, came out on John Arnison's Elusive label with the intention of giving a platform to some of the lesser-known bands. But one record towered over them all: Marillion's *Misplaced Childhood*.

Stu Nicholson: "It was obvious that Marillion were the big boys and no one was going to catch them. *Kayleigh* and *Lavender* took them to another level. If they'd have done Live Aid, they'd have gone stratospheric."

Mike Holmes: "We couldn't say there was no jealousy over Marillion's success. Of course we would like to have been in their place. But at the same time, it was great that there was a prog band that was getting that much attention. We just thought, 'If they can do it, so can we.'"

Graeme Murray: "Why *The Sentinel* didn't happen was predominantly record label politics. They were focusing on Marillion. They had a hit single; we didn't have anything that was going to get played on Radio 1. I remember having a conversation with someone from the label. They said, 'You're a rock band, Marillion are a pop band.'"

Mike Holmes: "We'd just done *The Wake*, it had a really great reception in the *Melody Maker*; it even got into the main charts, in the 70s. I remember unloading the van at one gig and thinking, 'This is a good time, I should pinpoint this in my mind and remember it.'"

Graeme Murray: "Recording *The Sentinel* was a different experience. When we'd gone into the studio before, we'd had five minutes to record things and it was all rushed. All of a sudden, we started to notice things were out of tune, so we'd end up doing things again. It was like pulling teeth, making that album. We drilled the energy out of it. But we had EMI distributing it, so it sold well for the time. When we got royalty statements, they said we'd sold 10,000 copies."

Pete Hinton: "I put together the *Fire In Harmony* album. The idea was that I really wanted to do a compilation album to help some of these bands onto the ladder. Pendragon, Solstice and Trilogy were already known, but other bands weren't — Haze and Liason and LaHost. I gave everyone £250 and said, 'Give us a track or record a new one.' I wasn't thinking, 'I'm going to make 10 million quid out of this!' I definitely didn't make 10 million quid out of it!"

Stu Nicholson: "Roy [Keyworth, original guitarist] formed Galahad in 1985 partly because he wanted to

listen to music that he liked because he was bored of all the generic rock stuff. We did our first gig on August 31, 1985, at Somerford Community Centre. My mum made me a cape. We were the only proggy band in Bournemouth."

The success of *Misplaced Childhood* set a high bar – one that the other bands couldn't match. By 1986, Solstice and Trilogy had already split up, while Twelfth Night and Pallas' lack of mainstream success would impact on their respective futures. The music industry's attention was elsewhere.

Nik Szymanek: "We'd had some interest from labels, but nothing had come of it. It was as if the rug had been sort of pulled out from under our feet. We were running just to stand still."

Andy Glass: "We'd changed line-ups and audiences were going, 'It's not the same any more.' So pretty much the last thing we did was Glastonbury in '85. We knew it was finished."

Brian Devoil: "We got a publishing and management deal with [Genesis/Phil Collins management company] Hit And Run. They set about trying to get us a deal. We were eventually signed by Virgin for the *XII* album. Could it have been anything to do with the fact that Phil Collins' contract was up and they wanted to sign him, and Hit And Run were managing him as well? We always thought it was a possibility."

Nick Barrett: "We'd done *The Jewel*, IQ had done *The Wake*, Twelfth Night had done their *XII* thing. And then bands started to get dropped by record labels."

Graeme Murray: "Euan [Lowson] kind of lost interest. We were working on the follow-up to *The Sentinel*, out isolated on this farm, and it was pretty cold and uncomfortable. He bought a bow and arrow and went off into the woods and played Robin Hood for nine months. We got in Alan [Reed, Lowson's replacement]. Maybe we were deluded, but we still believed in ourselves and in our music. Naïve as it sounded."

Mike Holmes: "Peter Mensch, Def Leppard's manager, started a label called Squawk, and they were looking for a prog band. We did two albums [1987's *Nomzamo* and 1989's *Are You Sitting Comfortably?*] for them. They had a distribution deal with Phonogram, and because he was Peter Mensch, they put a lot of weight behind it. But Phonogram never seemed massively interested in us, they just did what they had to do."

PRESS/PALLAS ARCHIVES/MIKE BENTLEY

Pallas in Atlanta for *The Sentinel* recording sessions, September 1983. Their favourite bar, Spondivits, is behind them; they could make a pitcher of beer last for hours.

Nick Barrett: "After *The Jewel* came out, John Arnison had said, 'Sorry, lads, we've run out of money.' So we started Toff records to release [1988's] *Kowtow*. A lot of people didn't like that album. The ones who would only listen to songs that were 18 minutes long disappeared. But other people stuck around and started to think, 'Actually, it's not bad.' It was a long game."

Brian Devoil: "I would say, a hit single would have helped us cross over. And a bit of support from the radio. Where were Marillion before *Kayleigh*? They were successful, but that's what really secured it for them."

Paul McMahon: "By '87, '88, we couldn't get a Marquee headline. They were telling us they didn't put prog gigs on anymore. We said, 'Well, you're putting Pendragon on.' They said, 'They're a pop-rock band.'"

Mike Holmes: "The scene had started to dissipate by the late 80s. A lot of it had to do with The Marquee moving from Wardour Street to Charing Cross Road. It was the base and the centre of it all, and things weren't the same after it moved."

Nick Barrett: "It's like something had a shelf life. There's an element of familiarity, people want change. It had just run its course as a scene."

Keith Turner: "We were still headlining at The Marquee. For us, it was getting better."

Stu Nicholson: "Did it feel like the scene was starting to fade out? No, not to us it didn't. We were just getting started."

Many of the bands that had helped to build up the scene didn't actually last until the end of the 1980s. Most notably, Twelfth Night and Pallas both stepped back from the fray. But several of them persevered – including Pendragon, Galahad, IQ (who reunited with Peter Nicholls) and Marillion, albeit without Fish.

Mike Holmes: "Things started to plateau for us. We lost the deal with Phonogram, and a friend of ours, Les Marshall, who had just become the band's bass player, died suddenly. That shocked everyone. We started thinking, 'We need to start taking care of everybody, these are the people you see every day, your best mates.' And so that was the impetus for us to start the label GEP [Giant Electric Pea]."

Stu Nicholson: "I could paper a bathroom with the rejection letters we got from various record companies. That's why we set up our own label, Avalon. Me and my wife, basically – we did all the work."

Mick Pointer: "After Marillion, I didn't touch another drumstick for 10 years. But then, sometime around 1995, I met a couple of guys who ran a fanzine, and they eventually introduced me to Clive Nolan. So that's how Arena started, and I've been doing it ever since."

PRESS/GALAHAD ARCHIVES

The first Galahad line-up, summer 1985, L-R: Paul Watts, Nick Hodgson, John O'Callaghan, Mike Hooker, Stuart Nicholson, Roy Keyworth, Patrick 'Paddy' O'Callaghan.

Nick Barrett: "A lot of people cite the 90s as being a barren desert. Well, not for us. We released our best-selling albums, we carried on touring. It was a knife edge about whether we'd be able to make this work. But we were desperate not to let it slip away."

Marillion aside, the 80s prog scene never had the same widespread impact as the 70s bands that inspired it. But its success can be measured in more than just record sales. Those acts that persevered through the barren years of the 1990s and early 2000s have emerged not just intact, but stronger, with the likes of IQ, Pendragon, Pallas and Galahad all releasing acclaimed albums and building loyal followings that have stuck with them down the years. Others, such as Solstice, Trilogy and Quasar, are back together and playing again, while Twelfth Night have become a successful cottage industry, curating their own legacy with a series of reissues and live albums. Tellingly, the sense of community between fans as well as bands feels as vibrant now as it did the first time around – maybe even more so...

Mike Holmes: "That 80s prog scene really brought it back to the streets. Not in the hip-hop sense, but in a grassroots sense."

Ed Percival: "I would not have missed it for the world. If *you'd* stood on the Marquee stage, with the audience in the palm of your hand, you'd go, 'Fucking hell, that's what it's all about!'"

Nick Barrett: "Did we keep prog alive? That's for someone else to say. But yes, we did."

Stephanie Bradley: "Marillion were probably the only band I didn't get to see at the Marquee, but never did I think back then that I'd end up working for them some 22 years later! Dreams can come true."

Stu Nicholson: "We played Lorelei [Night Of The Prog festival], in 2010, I was talking to Mark Kelly from Marillion, who was very nice – he even remembered that I'd auditioned for Marillion after Fish left. You had Twelfth Night there, you had the Pallas guys. All the rivalry between bands has gone now."

Brian Devoil: "I get emails every day from people who say how much they enjoy the music and how much it changed their lives."

Mike Holmes: "A few years ago now, I went to a playback of Steven Wilson's album *Grace For Drowning*. I went up to him and said, 'Hi Steven, I'm Mike from IQ,' and I told him I thought his album sounded great. He replied, 'I used to go and see your band when I was 14.'"

Nick Barrett: "It's easy to go, 'Yes, it was a *wonderful* time!' And it was. But it was also stressful and incredibly difficult. We could have all died on our arses and I could have been back on the farm."

Andy Glass: "There's not much I heard from that period that I think has made a major contribution to wider music, in the way that the real innovators who informed that period did. There was a lot of regurgitation going on. But it was fun. In fact it was fucking great."

A Mirror Of Dreams – The Progressive Rock Revival 1981 To 1983 will be published by Kingmaker Publishing in June 2024. See kingmakerpublishing.com for more.

"I would not have missed it for the world. If *you'd* stood on the Marquee stage, with the audience in the palm of your hand, you'd go, 'Fucking hell, that's what it's all about.'"

Ed Percival (Airbridge)

An 80s Prog Revival Primer

Vist our curated playlist at www.bit.ly/80s_prog_playlist or click on the QR code on the right.

Some known, some less well-known, but all these tracks serve as an introduction to the UK's prog landscape of the early 80s. They capture the youthful energy these bands brought to the prog fore, as well as more modern musical influences – and yet always with a respect for their forefathers.

Pallas – The Ripper (Arrive Alive, 1981)
The closing track from the Aberdeen quintet's self-financed debut cassette. An epic 15-minute song concerned with insanity, child abuse, rape and murder, which singer Euan Lowson would act out onstage dressed half as a woman, half as an old man. Quite!

Marillion – Grendel (Market Square Heroes, single, 1982)
The epic B-side to the band's debut 12-inch single for EMI (*Market Square Heroes* and *Three Boats Down From The Candy* were on the A-side). True, bits are similar to *Apocalypse In 9/8* from *Supper's Ready*, but it was a centrepiece of the band's live shows until they stopped playing it after their 1983 Reading Festival appearance.

Twelfth Night – Creepshow (Fact And Fiction, 1982)
Arguably *the* track from Twelfth Night's first full-length vinyl album *Fact And Fiction*, and possibly one of the finest songs they ever recorded, made more impactful live with Geoff Mann wrapping the mic lead around his face!

Airbridge – Words & Pictures (Words & Pictures, single, 1983)
A single that followed the band's *Paradise Moves* debut album, this sprightly, catchy number showed the more modern influence the 80s bands would end up bringing to the fore. It was even chosen by author Malcolm Bradbury when he appeared on BBC Radio 4's *Desert Island Discs*!

IQ – The Last Human Gateway (Tales From The Lush Attic, 1983)
The epic opening track from the Southampton band's first vinyl album *Tales From The Lush Attic*. At nearly 20 minutes, this tale of a young man who discovers he can't die was a staple of early live shows.

Trilogy – Arctic Life (Arctic Life Demo, 1983)
A proper neo-prog tour de force from the Essex trio, which was recorded at EMI's Manchester Square Studios as a demo for the label. It's still difficult to fathom why Trilogy never got a deal!

Solstice – Peace (Silent Dance, 1984)
The song might be titled *Peace*, but it didn't actually feature on the band's now legendary 1983 *The Peace Tape*. Instead it appeared on *Silent Dance*, their 1984 debut album. Witness then-singer Sandy Leigh's Jon Anderson-like vocals and a strong sense of melody that the band still retain today.

Liaison – Only Heaven Knows (single, 1984)
The west London quartet were Marquee regulars with two aces up their sleeve. Vocalist Howard Rogers and guitarist Keith Young were both on top form on this weaving and intricate track, which is now much sought-after. The band have recently reformed, by the way.

Haze – The Load (C'est La Vie, 1984)
Marquee regulars from about 1983 onwards, courtesy of their *Cellar Tapes* cassette, the epic *The Load* is from the band's 1984 debut release, *C'est La Vie*, which came housed in a vinyl sleeve. Melodrama with strong hints of Genesis.

Pendragon – The Black Knight (The Jewel, 1985)
This was a staple of the band's live shows in the early 80s, but *The Black Knight* didn't actually appear on any of Pendragon's early cassettes. Instead it popped up on 1985's full-length *The Jewel*. Still, for those of us that were there, the strong Arthurian imagery strikes a nostalgic chord.

Quasar – Fire In The Sky (Fire In Harmony, 1985)
The title of the band's 1982 album, this was a re-recording for the *Fire In Harmony* compilation, by which time former Solstice singer Sue Robinson had replaced vocalist Paul Vigras. **JE**

THE UNSEEN GREG LAKE

On the back of the recently released *Magical* box set covering **Greg Lake**'s career outside of Emerson, Lake & Palmer, *Prog* brings you a selection of previously unseen photos from the Lake archives, which show off a very different side to the rock superstar.

Words: Jerry Ewing **Captions:** Regina Lake
Images: Kenny Smith

Did you ever think you'd see Greg Lake doing the plank with David Bowie? Fly fishing with Jack Hargreaves? Larking around with Bedouins in the desert? Well, look no further!

It all started innocently enough, with a train journey and a conversation with the PR for the *Magical* box set. Out of the blue, the PR announced that he had been given a whole load of previously unseen photos from the Lake archive – captioned by Greg's wife, Regina – and within seconds we'd decided that we just had to share them in *Prog*. They show a more private side to Lake, who, outside of the glaring spotlight of Emerson, Lake & Palmer – and let's face it, that spotlight was particularly glaring – tended to shun the limelight for a quieter existence.

What strikes us most when looking at these pictures – which include Lake relaxing at a party in Switzerland for Zowie Bowie (now filmmaker Duncan Jones) with David Bowie and Atlantic Records supremo Ahmet Ertegun; the musician at home in Surrey; enjoying family time with Regina and daughter Natasha; recording the video for *I Believe In Father Christmas* in the Egyptian desert; and sharing a laugh with Keith and Carl – is that we see the real Greg Lake.

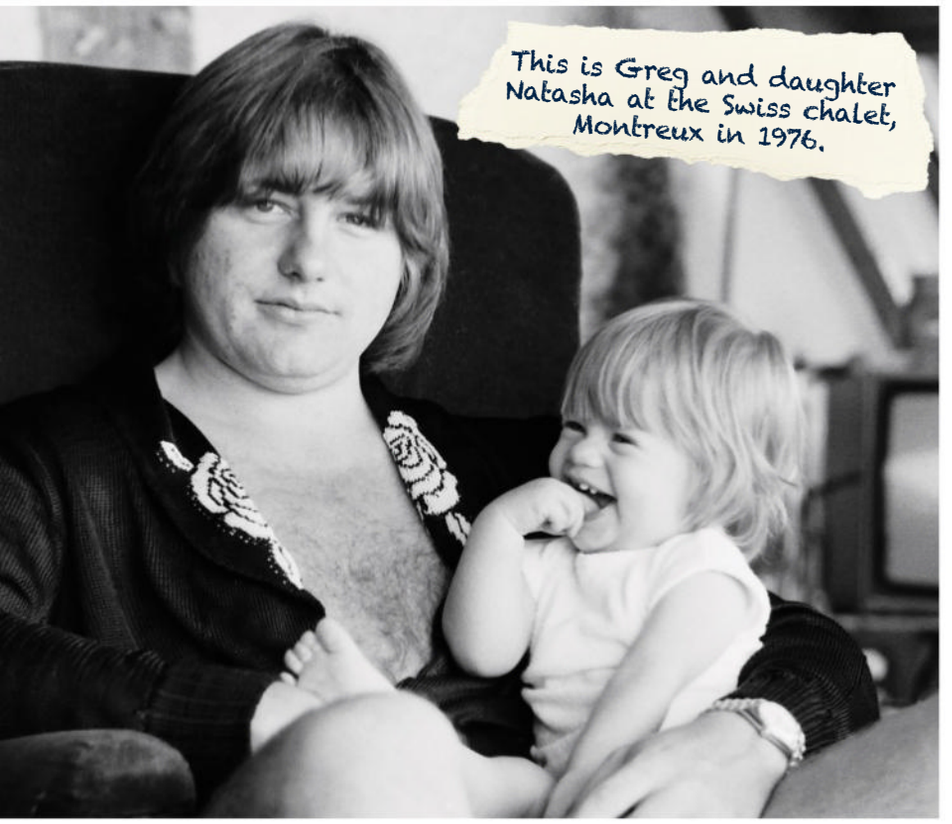
And, at a time of the year that's soundtracked by *that* seasonal UK No.2 hit from 1975, what better way is there to remember the great prog hero? Enjoy!

Magical is out now via Spirit Of Unicorn. See www.manticorerecords.com for more information.

This was taken during the filming of Fanfare For The Common Man in Montreal, in 1977 at The Olympic Stadium.

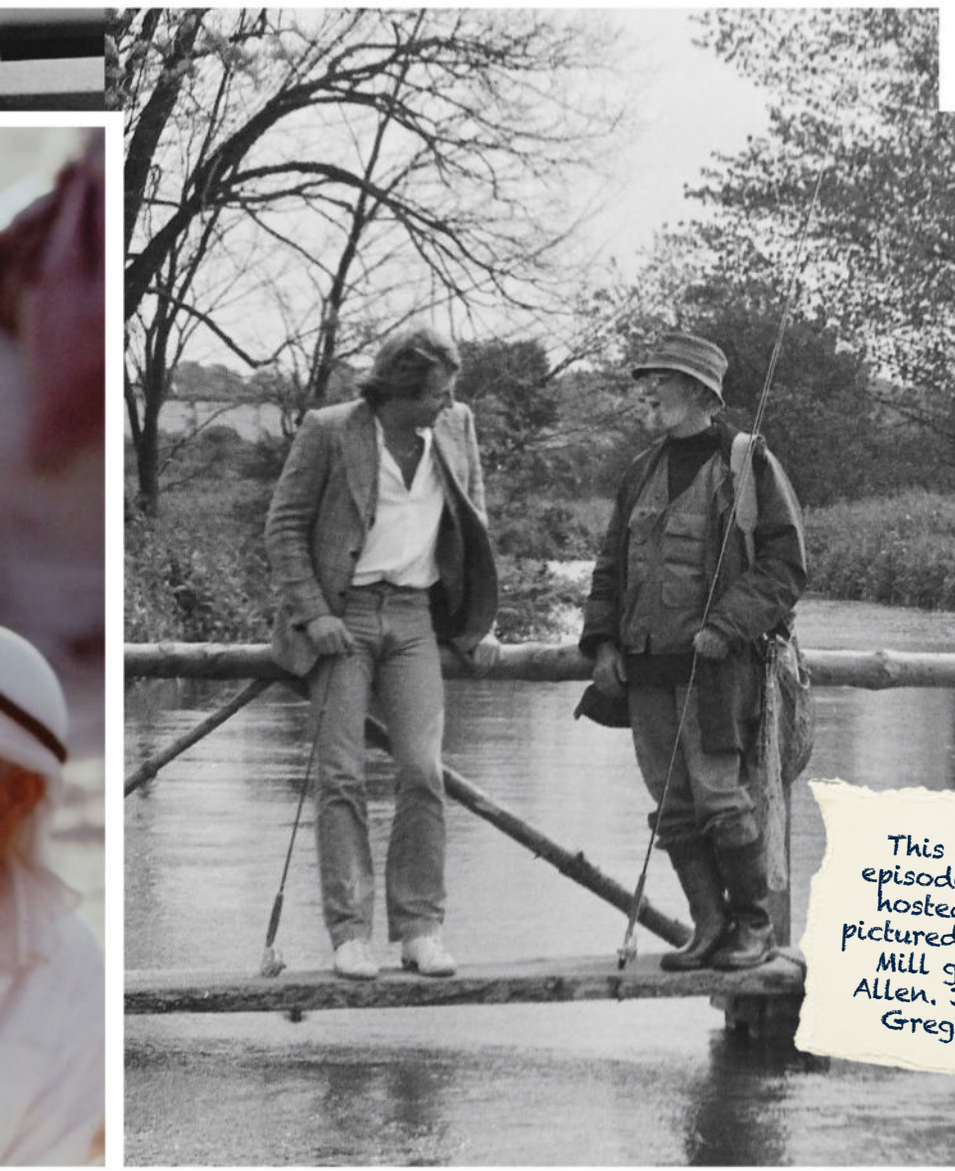
Greg and I at the Windsor funfair. I think it was in 1975. Kenny Smith was with us but we were completely unaware that he took this picture. Kenny told me about six years ago, that this photograph is his very favourite one he ever took of us together.

I love it, never saw it before, but it's Greg being set up with his guitar by the amazing Kenny Smith, for the filming of I Believe In Father Christmas in November 1975.



This is Greg and daughter Natasha at the Swiss chalet, Montreux in 1976.

This was taken in the stable yard of Windlesham Hall, our house in Surrey, in the summer of 1975.



This was taken during the filming of an episode of the Out Of Town TV programme, hosted by the legendary Jack Hargreaves, pictured with Greg. Filmed at our Stanbridge Mill grounds on our stretch of the River Allen. Jack devoted half of this episode to Greg and his skills as a fly fisherman.

Never Say

While the days have largely passed when an artist might release two studio albums in quick succession, a decade has elapsed since Moon Safari issued *Himlabacken Vol. 1*. And while they have not usurped American businessman cum musician Dean Gitter (who took a mere 57 years to follow up 1957's *Ghost Ballads* with *Old Folkies Never Die*), the Swedes were fast approaching the almost 12 years that elapsed between King Crimson's *Three Of A Perfect Pair* and *Thrak*.

So, after a steady work rate that yielded the band's first four studio albums in the period from 2005 to 2013, how on earth did it take Moon Safari so long to release the excellent *Himlabacken Vol. 2*?

Never

It seemed like an impossible dream, but **Moon Safari's** highly anticipated follow-up to *Himlabacken Vol. 1* is finally out. And what an album it is. *Prog* catches up with vocalist/guitarist Petter Sandström and bassist Johan Westerlund to find out why it took them so long to create a slice of pure prog heaven.

Words: Nick Shilton **Images:** Carina Hedlund

"Perhaps we can blame the kids?!" says lead vocalist/acoustic guitarist Petter Sandström from his home in Stockholm.

Sweden's birth rate this millennium has dropped well below two children per woman, but Moon Safari have clearly been doing their utmost to buck the trend and expand their homeland's population.

"When we started this recording, there were four kids among the six bandmembers; now there are 16," expands Umeå-based bassist/vocalist Johan Westerlund.

But beyond the domestic matters and day job commitments that continually slowed the progress of making the album, there were some band issues.

Moon Safari: the circus has come to an end, now they can bask in acclaim.

"There was just so much circus along the way," Westerlund says with a sigh, and admits there were times when Moon Safari thought that the album would never be finished.

"This process has taken forever. It felt like the album was cursed. When we got the master done this summer, a big weight was lifted. Then it was onto the fun stuff – getting the

"When we started this recording, there were four kids among the six bandmembers; now there are 16."
Johan Westerlund

artwork and everything ready for release and starting to talk to people is such a different world. It's hard to realise that we're done."

In the gap between the two volumes of *Himlabacken,* Moon Safari experienced the trials and tribulations that so many bands go through during their careers. In 2015 with the departure of drummer Tobias Lundgren and his replacement by Mikael Israelsson, the band's line-up changed for the first time since their debut, *A Doorway To Summer,* announced their arrival in fine style in 2005. The switch involved some trauma, too.

"Something had to change," explains Westerlund. "We'd been doing Moon Safari for over 10 years at that point and had done the same kind of recording a few times in a row."

Lundgren's exit was ultimately triggered by the band being offered the opportunity to support Yes on a European tour. With two small children, the drummer wasn't in a position to commit to the amount of travelling it would involve.

"And with that, other storms started to brew. We had a bad fall out with Tobias and it wasn't handled well," Sandström admits. "The separation was ugly but we're friends now. Tobias and I get together every couple of months and he has a great band now [Windom End]."

Israelsson had previously deputised for Lundgren in spring 2014 for Moon Safari's first appearance on Cruise To The Edge and a preceding Mexican show.

"We noticed how good it sounded," Sandström continues. "We realised we could be on a new level with Mike, or keep on a safe steady mid-level with Tobias."

Westerlund elaborates, "Mike has been a great addition to the band. His drumming is out of this world. As a bass player, I've taken steps that I wouldn't have if he wasn't in the band."

L-R: Johan Westerlund, Petter Sandström, Mikael Israelsson.

***Himlabacken Vol. 2* is out now... at long last!**

Beyond Lundgren's departure, Westerlund and Sandström readily admit that, at various points in the tortuous process of making *Himlabacken Vol. 2,* each bandmember wanted to throw in the towel. Indeed, one of them actually briefly did, namely the band's other lead vocalist and keyboardist Simon Åkesson, who spent several months outside Moon Safari in 2017.

"Simon had always been up and down, but this was on a different level," Westerlund says. "He was really low; it wasn't fun for him any more and he needed to change something. He had announced he would quit the band before we did a show in Japan."

Initially Åkesson was diagnosed with alcoholism, but there was some doubt over this.

"He got counselling, but then they said, 'You're really too young to have developed full-blown alcoholism.'"

On seeking a second opinion, Åkesson's diagnosis was revised to bipolar disorder and, with more appropriate medication prescribed, his absence from the band would prove short-lived. Former Flower Kings keyboardist and long-time Moon Safari champion Tomas Bodin had stepped in, but Åkesson would return swiftly.

After a couple of months Westerlund travelled back to the band's hometown, Skellefteå, almost 500 miles north of Stockholm, and met Åkesson for what proved an artistically constructive and cathartic experience for them both.

"We went to the studio and started reworking the song that would become *Between The Devil And Me*," Westerlund recalls, speaking of the first single extracted from the new album.

"I asked Simon, 'What's the worst part of your experience with this sickness or disease?' He was honest. And I wrote those lyrics from his perspective, imagining what he was going through. That lyric just came out the same day. It was a good twist to him wanting to quit the band."

Bodin was ready to fulfil Moon Safari's obligation to perform on 2018's Cruise To The Edge, but it wasn't long before Åkesson felt ready to return and Bodin's Moon Safari tenure was over almost before it had begun.

Although it's taken Moon Safari a decade to release *Himlabacken Vol. 2*, they haven't been sitting idly. Apart from further Cruise To The Edge shows, they've travelled widely and performed across Europe and in North America, including two appearances at RoSFest. Surely with all six bandmembers based in Sweden — the Åkesson brothers (Pontus, Simon and Sebastian) and Israelsson are all based in and around Skellefteå — it should be easier to record an album than tour internationally?

"We would always have the discussion, whether we should take gigs or just focus on writing and recording the album," Sandström reveals. "Getting together for rehearsals takes valuable time which we could put into the recording and finishing the goddamn album! But we often get offered these fun gigs. 'Does anybody want to go on holiday and play some music?' 'Yeah! Where are we going?' 'The Bahamas!'"

Or, as Westerlund pithily puts it: "Do you want to be in the studio tracking the same thing over and over again, or do you want to go to Tokyo?"

"We're quite a well-oiled machine when it comes to playing live," Sandström states. "We pick a setlist and everybody does their homework. When we meet for rehearsal we can chug through the songs pretty fast."

The lengthy gestation period of *Himlabacken Vol. 2*, combined with a smattering of performances by the band over the last decade, means that a few of the songs on the album were aired live well in advance of the album's release. Indeed, the punchy *Emma, Come On* was performed as long ago as May 2016, when the band opened

for Yes at the Royal Albert Hall in London, while an earlier version of *Between The Devil And Me* was debuted in 2018.

However some of the songs on the album are considerably older in origin. Sandström reveals that the introduction of *Forever, For You* dates back as far as 2010, while *Between The Devil...*, the irrepressibly catchy *Blood Moon* and album highlight, the 20-plus-minute epic *Teen Angel Meets The Apocalypse* all date back to 2014/15, with some early demos recorded in early 2014. Perhaps contrary to expectation, Sandström regards the band as fairly speedy when it comes to songwriting:

"We wrote *Teen Angel...* in one weekend. We had the basic structure for that song down in the demo that's structurally not really that far from the final track. There's bells and whistles, of course, but the main structure of the song was there after three days in 2014."

Conversely, however, one song — the gorgeous three-minute *Epilog*, which closes the album — was written in spring 2023. *Epilog* is the band's first vocal in their native tongue and if, with its church organ and choir of voices, it sounds like a hymn, that's precisely because it is. According to Sandström, the Swedish church authorities were soliciting submissions for an updated hymnal. With only four days available before the submissions deadline, *Epilog* was written, but the band ran out of time to notate it properly. Nevertheless they felt that it should bring the *Himlabacken* albums to a close.

"We were seeking the feeling of a Communion hymn and singing in Swedish for the first time," he explains.

Himlabacken Vol. 2 represents the epitome of Moon Safari. This isn't the gnarliest, most challenging or innovative progressive music of 2023. It is, however, a glorious summation of everything the band have strived for since their inception: wonderful vocal harmonies and enhancing rich melodies that marry progressive rock and AOR perhaps better than any band, particularly on the prog ballad par excellence, *A Lifetime To Learn How To Love*. There's both immediacy and depth to the songs throughout.

Arguably, balancing families and day jobs over the last decade — plus those forays to play various live shows overseas — has undermined any momentum that might otherwise have rendered Moon Safari a much more prominent name on the progressive scene. After all, this is a band that played a well-received 30-minute support slot for Yes in 2016.

"We had a show in London the next day [at the Borderline] and something in Norway during the summer. But we didn't have any big plans," Westerlund explains. "And you have to remember, at the time Simon was not doing great and going back and forth about wanting to be in the band at all. It was really not the time to think about pushing for a tour. And also we were saying that when the album is finished, then we will do more stuff. We were always in between the perfect time."

Perhaps now with stability returned to the Moon Safari universe and *Himlabacken Vol. 2* finally released, the band can bask in the acclaim that the album has received so far.

"Considering the early response, it seems whatever the process was like, the end result gives the fans what they want. That's a success, whichever way you look at it," Westerlund concludes. "If this thing won't fly, nothing we'll ever do will."

> "We would always have the discussion, whether we should take gigs or just focus on writing and recording the album. Getting together for rehearsals takes valuable time which we could put into the recording and finishing the goddamn album!"
>
> **Petter Sandström**

Himlabacken Vol. 2 is out now via Blomljud Records. See www.moonsafari.se for more information.

L-R: Pontus Åkesson, Sebastian Åkesson, Simon Åkesson.

Wish You Were Here

A decade in the making, the debut album from **Tarja Turunen's Outlanders** project is the perfect antidote to these chaotic times. Featuring guest appearances from a host of celebrated musicians, including Mike Oldfield, Trevor Rabin and Steve Rothery, it showcases a very different side to the Finnish soprano who's better known for her dramatic progressive metal and classical recordings. She shares the story behind *Outlanders* and the Alan Parsons album that inspired it.

Words: Dannii Leivers **Images:** earMUSIC

Tarja Turunen can remember the first time she set foot on Antigua. It was 2007, and a "chaotic" period in the Finnish soprano's life: two years after her very public, acrimonious split from symphonic giants Nightwish, the band with whom she made her name, and one year after the launch of her solo career. What she needed, more than anything, was anonymity. Immediately, she fell in love with the beautiful scenery, easy-going way of life and the overwhelming sense of seclusion.

"You will find a beach where you will be alone the whole day. It's so chilled and so positive," she says over Zoom from her current home in the Andalusia region of

Torsten Stenzel and Tarja's *Outlanders* album, out now.

southern Spain, the memory of her first visit to the Caribbean still vivid 16 years on. "It was like, 'Wow. I love this. I can be no one here.'"

By the end of the holiday, she and her husband-manager, Marcelo Cabuli, had bought a holiday house facing out over Antigua's turquoise sea and forest-covered mountains. Since then, it's been her second home and her happy place, as well as the source of inspiration for her long-awaited, all-star project, Outlanders. An album of the same name, which was mostly written and mixed on the island over the last 10-plus years, was released in June 2023 and is unlike anything we've heard from Tarja before.

Working with her long-term friend and *Tubular Beats* collaborator, EDM DJ Torsten Stenzel, it sees her pair her soaring, operatic vocals with the sort of pulsating, blissful ambient, proggy electronica you'd hear in a beachside bar. The album's guitars come courtesy of some of modern prog's most influential players, with Mike Oldfield, Trevor Rabin and Marillion's Steve Rothery among a star-studded guest list featuring on different tracks. The result is miles apart from the orchestral drama we've come to expect from Tarja's solo work — it's a chilled-out, sun-drenched love letter to Antigua.

"The energy on the island [has] always made me create," she says. "The nature. The people. Antiguan history. The ocean. I wanted the listeners to find that kind of inner peace while listening to these songs."

Turunen and Stenzel met in Ibiza in 2006, where they had worked together during the writing sessions for her solo debut, *My Winter Storm*. By the time they started Outlanders, Stenzel had relocated to Antigua and Turunen had taken up residence in Argentina.

"We were people living in countries other than our home countries," the vocalist says, explaining that the theme of belonging runs throughout their self-titled album. "I have always felt like home is where your heart is really. Where you feel your heart is safe."

"I've been listening to Marillion for a long, long time"

The seeds for Outlanders were first sown in 2010 when Tarja wrote a song she knew didn't fit with the icy material she was creating for her day job.

"I wanted to use it and I couldn't find a way how," she remembers.

Back then, she had only had one brush with electronic music — working with German producer Schiller on 2005 club track *Tired Of Being Alone*, an experience she had enjoyed, and wanted to explore further.

"[Electronic music] has always been something that has appealed to me," she says. "It felt very natural."

She took the new song to Stenzel and together they turned it into *Outlanders*' dreamy title track.

"I didn't feel like I needed to write a certain kind of song. It was just a mindflow: free and easy," she recalls, revealing that she found the challenge extremely liberating.

The result truly is mesmerising. It includes sublime guitar work from Rata Blanca's Walter Giardino, whose soaring solo evokes the sensation of the weight of the world dropping from your shoulders. It's a soft ambient haze that rises and falls like lapping waves and sets the mood for further electronic material. Although Giardino appears on three of the eventual album's tracks, Turunen invited a revolving cast of guitarists to the contribute to the rest of the project. She credits *Return To Tunguska*, a collaboration between Alan Parsons and David Gilmour from the former's 2004 *A Valid Path* album, for giving her the idea.

"I had a long, long list of names," she says with a laugh, explaining that for each song, she had considered the style and sound of each musician before approaching them directly with a demo.

The finished album features 10 guitarists: alongside Oldfield, Rabin and Rothery are Walter Giardino, Joe Satriani, Michael Jackson guitarist Jennifer Batten, jazz fusion artist Al Di Meola, Living Colour's Vernon Reid, Ron 'Bumblefoot' Thal and ex-Megadeth man Marty Friedman. The first person to agree to the project was Trevor Rabin, whose expansive solos merge with Stenzel's Balearic beats and piano on the gently euphoric *Closer To The Sky*.

"I've been a huge fan of Trevor's work with Yes and as a film composer," she says with a smile. "I felt like I'd always known this man. He is such a gentleman; such a sweet person and he came up with incredible things."

While she held back from being too prescriptive about how she wanted each musician to perform ("I wanted to give them freedom to express themselves") some songs, like the spiritual *Echoes* featuring Jennifer Batten, warranted more direction.

Seasons end... Turunen's latest festive album, *Dark Christmas* is also out now.

PRESS/TIM TRONCKOE/EARMUSIC

"It was a song written a long time ago, but it made sense [to make it an Outlanders song]," says Tarja, who wrote the lyrics to honour Antigua's African heritage. "I wanted to somehow capture female sensitivity. I said, 'Just think about the whole history of Africa, just give it your sensitive touch,' and Jennifer did insanely beautiful work."

While Outlanders has presented an opportunity for Tarja to push herself creatively beyond her comfort zone, it's also clear that this project is a labour of love that's seen her tick some special collaborations from her own bucket list.

"I've been listening to Marillion for a long, long time. I went to see their shows," she says of the Steve Rothery-featuring track *Mystique Voyage*, a dreamy reworking of a song from her 2013 solo album, *Colours In The Dark*.

"I had a clear idea in mind [and] he understood my song," she says. "Instead of me singing the chorus melody, he was playing the melody with his guitar. In that sense, the song has more space for guitars, but it doesn't need more. It was a pleasure to work with him, but I felt we had a deeper connection. I would love to work with him in the future, too."

Winter warmer: the Outlanders project is a sun-drenched love letter to Antigua.

PRESS/EARMUSIC

Had it not been for the pandemic, the material that makes up *Outlanders* would probably still be languishing on a hard drive in Antigua. Although Turunen had been able to join Walter Giardino in the studio in Argentina where he had recorded his instrumentation, balancing a solo career with raising a young daughter had made it difficult for the vocalist to focus on finishing the rest of the album. As the world went into lockdown and her tour was cancelled, it freed her up and things gathered speed.

"We were at home, isolated, and I said, 'I need to wrap this up,'" she recalls. "God knows how long it might have taken us otherwise."

She began recording her vocals alone at home, working for the first time without the help of a producer.

"Computers crashed several times during the process," she remembers. "I recorded vocals for some of the songs, I think, four or five times. But on the other hand, I started doing my job alone, learning many things."

> "I have been a huge fan of Trevor Rabin's work with Yes and as a film composer. I felt like I'd always known this man. He is such a gentleman."

The remaining guitarists recorded their parts remotely, while Stenzel finished off the mixing from Antigua.

"It was insanely nice to have a purpose," she remembers. "I felt really miserable during those first couple of months without knowing how long we would be in this situation, then I started working on *Outlanders*. It gave me a lot of positive energy."

Now, as she looks back on the project, she recognises the experience of finishing the album was more than just a way to fill her days, locked away in isolation.

"My confidence grew," she says, "I'm [more] open-minded and ready for new challenges. The music on the album will surprise people, but the feedback I have got from my fans, from rock followers, from metal fans, is that they love the project. They really have enjoyed it very much. They can find me in a completely different light as a vocalist."

That positive momentum has spilled out from the *Outlanders* sessions. Already Turunen, who has recently released another album of seasonal favourites, *Dark Christmas*, is planning a follow-up with an all-new wish list of guitarists. Although this time she has no intention of taking a decade to release it.

"I have some people in mind, and I have contacted them already," she says with a laugh. "So, no, this is not the end of Outlanders!"

Outlanders and Dark Christmas are out now via earMUSIC. See www.tarja-outlanders.com and tarjaturunen.com for more information.

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PROG

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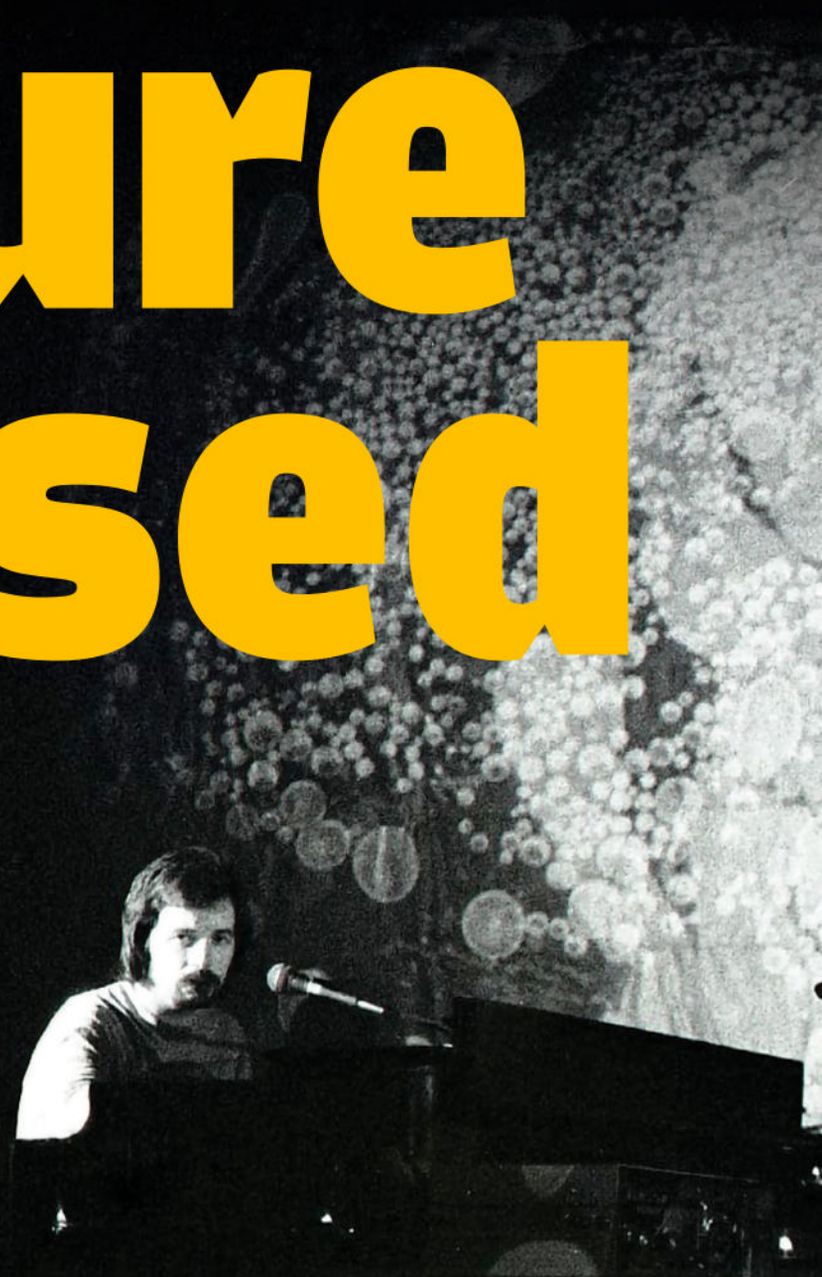
DECCA DERAM

Days Of Future Passed

Fifty-one years ago, Germany-based **Nektar** finally made headway in their native UK with fourth album *Remember The Future*. The conceptual piece explored prescient themes of the environment and looking after the planet against a sci-fi-inspired backdrop. Long-serving bassist Derek 'Mo' Moore recalls the story of the recently reissued record that was way ahead of its time.

Words: James McNair **Images:** Karin Janssens



"Frank Zappa loved our music, though, and he actually wanted to sign us to his label."

By 1973, the year in which Nektar made their most celebrated album, *Remember The Future*, the four virtuoso Brits who comprised the group were honorary Germans. They lived in Germany, they'd recorded three LPs for the German label Bellaphon/Bacillus, they had German girlfriends or wives, and German artist Helmut Wenske painted their album sleeves. Thanks to their mind-expanding live shows and LPs, such as their 1971 debut *Journey To The Centre Of The Eye*, Nektar sat at the epicentre of a vibrant, bohemian scene that drew hip young German devotees.

"The UK scene at that time was mainly based on pop music," says Nektar's bassist Derek 'Mo' Moore today. "That was all you heard on the radio. But in Germany people weren't very interested in pop music — they wanted to listen to something new, something fresh. We loved people like Vanilla Fudge and The Moody Blues, but we tried not to listen to too much of other people's stuff so that we wouldn't be influenced by it."

Together with frontman/guitarist Roye Albrighton, keyboardist Allan 'Taff' Freeman and drummer Ron Howden, Moore had formed Nektar in Hamburg four years earlier. Quickly scoring a month-long residency at the city's famed Star Club in 1969, they trod boards previously played by The Beatles and countless other luminaries, playing from 6pm-2am every night, one hour on, one hour off. This punishing schedule lent itself to improvisation, something at which Nektar soon came to excel. They performed to packed, relatively small-capacity crowds, writing fabulous new music on the hoof, and later adapting it for their recording sessions.

"It was an incredible time and Black Sabbath, Spooky Tooth and Ace Kefford from The Move were passing through, too," says Moore, recalling the band's early club dates in Germany.

"We'd take a kind of speed called Captagon to keep going, and we played so much that we didn't have to think about it. Cozy Powell was the drummer in Ace's band [The Ace Kefford Stand], and we had a lot of fun with Cozy! If we weren't sleeping we were partying — and there wasn't much sleeping..."

Nektar had a secret weapon, too: lighting tech and honorary fifth member, Mick Brockett. Previously employed by Pink Floyd, Brockett was a maestro of the liquid light show, manipulating colour wheel slides

A magical time: Nektar live in 1973 at the album photo session.

with an oil or liquid dye solution trapped inside to create trippy, outlandish backdrops that chimed with Nektar's deliciously far-out music.

"I'd tell club owners that it would be another 300 Deutsch Marks if they wanted our light show," says Moore. "They'd say, 'We've got one.' I'd say, 'Not like this one, you haven't!' They always paid up once they'd seen it."

Chatting to *Prog* from his Lexington, North Carolina home, Moore is now the only surviving member of the original Nektar line-up. Roye Albrighton died in 2016 and Alan 'Taff' Freeman passed away in 2021. *Prog* had been due to interview Nektar's drummer Ron Howden too, but sadly he died in September, just days before we were due to speak.

"It was awful, because me and Ron had been out playing dates together with the current line-up of Nektar here in the US," says Moore. "And just a week before Ron passed, we'd been jamming on new stuff and it sounded great. On the Sunday he said, 'Let me take a thumb drive of the new music and I'll get on it.' Then on the Tuesday his wife Anne called me to say he'd been rushed into hospital, where he'd suffered a brain aneurysm."

Though Moore was obviously shaken by Howden's passing – "You have to remember we played together for 60 years," he notes – he seems admirably stoical about being the last man standing. Now 77, and originally from South Yorkshire, he tells of how he and his wife Nicky are still close to Roye Albrighton's German-born widow, Catrin, one of many in Nektar's inner circle who attended Ron Howden's Celebration Of Life ceremony in the US.

Nektar in 1973, L-R: Derek 'Mo' Moore, Roye Albrighton, Allan 'Taff' Freeman and (opposite page) Ron Howden.

Moore also mentions the new Nektar live DVD, due out later in 2024, which documents some of Howden's final shows. Nektar will continue, it seems, but we're here to talk about *Remember The Future*: its trippy, part-environmental concept, its intricate lattices of taut, hooky prog, and the recently released four-CD box set that celebrates this wonderful record's 50th anniversary. As *Prog* and Moore strap in for a journey back to 1970s Germany, his eyes light up.

"I can talk as long as you want," he says.

Nektar knew from the outset that they were onto something special with *Remember The Future*. But with loads of other new music already written and not yet committed to tape, a palate-cleansing exercise was required.

"Our third album, *...Sounds Like This*, was decent stuff we had to get out of our system," says Moore. "We needed to clear our heads for the main project."

The band's confidence was such that they decided to record *...Sounds Like This* live in the village of Stommeln, near Cologne at the studios of famed Tangerine Dream and Scorpions producer, Dieter Dierks. Dierks' first taste of recording a British rock band had been Nektar's debut, *Journey To The Centre Of The Eye*, then its similarly lysergic 1972 follow-up, *A Tab In The Ocean*. Now, with Nektar and Bellaphon Records head Peter Hauke producing and Dierks engineering, Dierks Studios opened its doors to the 40-odd competition winners Nektar had selected to witness proceedings, Mick Brockett light show and all.

Job done, Nektar then relocated to the tiny Black Forest village of Wembach,

***Remember The Future*'s gorgeous front and back covers.**

where work on *Remember The Future* began in earnest. Another graphic artist friend, Klaus Holitzka (who designed science-fiction book covers and sold artworks at Nektar's gigs), had alerted them to a village hall rehearsal space directly opposite his home, which was available rent-free.

"Holly, as we called him, was a great guy and we'd play there about 12 hours a day, record everything roughly, then listen back and piece together the bits we liked," says Moore. "There was a little Gasthaus/restaurant next door, and we'd have a bratwurst there and discuss concepts."

Even at this relatively early stage, Helmut Wenske — very much Nektar's Roger Dean figure — had already been instructed to crack on with *Remember The Future*'s artwork. All he had to go on, though, was its title, something that Nektar's lighting engineer (and co-lyricist with Moore) Mick Brockett had come up with.

"Mick's brain would come up with this brilliant back-to-front stuff," says Moore. "You know, a bit like Ringo Starr coming up with the title of *A Hard Day's Night*..."

When Nektar saw the stunning surrealist sci-fi artwork Wenske had painted, they were delighted. But it was a small detail from the back cover — a winged blue man — that proved most significant and inspirational.

"Independently of that, we'd already come up with a character called Bluebird," says Moore. "And there he was."

Remember The Future's concept can seem woolly — and not just because it has several threads. Some say the LP concerns an extra-terrestrial who enlightens humankind about impending environmental catastrophe, but is that true?

"Somewhat, yes," says Moore. "We were obviously in that universe. Everything is in there: recycling is in there... we were ahead of our time. Basically, *Remember The Future* is the story of a little blind boy. We don't know his name, but he meets Bluebird, who's trying to direct him, and to direct the whole human race, in fact. Bluebird projects his thoughts and his own image into the little boy's brain. He's saying, 'Remember the future is always going to be there, so you better look after it.'"

Sounds like some pretty strong weed was smoked!

"Very likely," laughs Moore. "We used to tour with the Welsh band Man a lot. We did a tour through Germany called The Manektar Tour, took a whole kilo of hash with us and there wasn't the tiniest blim left. If we had no filters for our joints, [one of the Man guys] would just rip a page out of his passport."

Breaking with tradition, Nektar recorded *Remember The Future* outside Germany. It was nailed in just five days, August 12-16, 1973 at Chipping Norton residential studios in Oxfordshire. *Images Of The Past*, the opening section of *Remember The Future, Pt. 1*, immediately presented Nektar as a prog act with a distinctly funky side, while *Wheel Of Time* showcased their magnificent vocal harmonies.

"It was awful, because me and Ron had been out playing dates together with the current line-up of Nektar here in the US. And just a week before Ron passed, we'd been jamming on new stuff and it sounded great."

STEPHANIE BARTIK

Nektar's 50th Anniversary Tour at The Linda, New York, on March 9, 2023.

"It was the height of summer, but we never saw the sun," recalls Moore. "There was an amazing synergy between us. I think the longest single session was 72 hours straight, so we were feeding the engineer Barry Hammond AN1 speed pills. Me and Mick had to scramble to write lyrics for the vocal melodies Roye was scatting, then we'd pluck vocal harmonies out of the air, the four of us singing them around one mic."

Nektar barely paused for breath, far less sleep. Two days after the album sessions wrapped, they were in Copenhagen to support Frank Zappa & The Mothers on their Over-Nite Sensation tour. Although Zappa's tours were drug-free zones, he knew where to find his bandmates after watching Nektar from the side of the stage.

"They'd all pile into our dressing-room for obvious reasons," says Moore with a laugh. "Frank was like, 'You guys look beat, man — I know what you've been smoking.' He loved our music, though, and he actually wanted to sign us to his label."

Back at CBS Studios in London, meanwhile, the newfangled quadrophonic mix session for *Remember The Future* had gone awry, parts of Roye Albrighton's brilliant wah-wah and Leslie cabinet guitar work all but disappearing due to phase cancellation issues. The stunning version of the album we know today was down to an 11th-hour remix/restoration at Dieter Dierks' studios in Stommeln, where all problems were resolved. Once again, Germany had come up trumps for Nektar.

It was internationally, though, that they now triumphed. *Remember The Future* reached No.19 in the US charts in 1974, changing the band's fortunes forever, and in time winning them such disparate fans as Pink Floyd's Nick Mason, Iron Maiden's Steve Harris and Joy Division's Ian Curtis.

Even now, Mo Moore finds it hard to pinpoint exactly why the LP has charmed so many.

"All I can tell you is that it was a magical moment in time," he says. "The flow of it was very special."

More pertinent and timely in this grave era of global warming, is Moore's sign-off in his sleeve notes for *Remember The Future*'s 50th anniversary edition.

"When we wrote and recorded [it] we thought we could make a difference to the way humans treated our planet," he writes. "In 1973 we still had the chance to act, but didn't... Remember The Future."

Remember The Future is out now via Esoteric. See nektarsmusic.com for more information.

Sonic Dystopia

For his solo career, Riverside's **Mariusz Duda** wanted to create something as distinct from his day job as possible. He talks to *Prog* about returning to his first musical love, being creatively selfish, and embracing electronic music on *AFR AI D*.

Words: David West **Images:** Oskar Szramka

"I'm inspired by limitations," says Mariusz Duda. As the mastermind of Riverside and Lunatic Soul, Duda is comfortable being a musical chameleon. But recently he's expanded far beyond the bounds of progressive rock. He released three albums of electronica — *Lockdown Spaces*, *Claustrophobic Universe* and *Interior Drawings*, known collectively as the *Lockdown Trilogy* — in quick succession in 2020 and 2021. Now, with *AFR AI D*, his latest work as a solo artist, he's giving free rein to his formative influences.

"I grew up on Tangerine Dream, Jean-Michel Jarre, Vangelis," says Duda. "Later on, Mike Oldfield and later, *later* on, progressive music. My very first music as a composer was electronic music. In the *Lockdown Trilogy* artbook, I even put a photo of my cassette tapes that I recorded in 1992. I had 15 of them. Believe me, no one wants to listen to that these days, but for me it was just the beginning. I wanted to emphasise that this is really important music for me."

In 2023, Duda had originally planned to devote his time and energy to writing the next Lunatic Soul album, but then he went on vacation and everything changed.

"I decided to go on a holiday with my family in April, and I took some serious rest," he says. "I was so happy after we came back that I had to do something with myself, so I opened the computer and boom, in six weeks I had this idea. I heard about ChatGPT, artificial intelligence. I thought, 'This is a great idea for the album but I'm not going to use that in Riverside, because when I record another Riverside album, it will be 2025, probably everyone will have forgotten about ChatGPT, it will be nothing new. I can't do this in Lunatic Soul because that's more ephemeral. Artificial intelligence in there? No. But I can continue my electronic work. It fits!'"

"I always write about loneliness, about struggling with things around me, about the trial of surviving these days, about fear and anxiety," he says. "All my albums are more like therapy, that's why I'm trying to record so many of them. That's why I never wanted to only be part of a band, I wanted to have my own Marvel Universe."

While the artificial intelligence references are clear, Duda says that AI represents anything we fear and the darkness someone might face in life.

"Everyone has their own demons they're struggling with. I've got my own," he says. "We live in really uncertain times, we are afraid of many things, so I wanted to record an album about taming nightmares. I wanted to return to the darkness but at the same time I need another album that helps me to cool down."

Duda wanted the album to address these fears while retaining a sense of optimism and human resilience.

"It's not the end of the world and we can embrace the future," he says. "I don't believe in this vision from *The Terminator* that artificial intelligence will rule humanity. I believe we'll die much sooner because the sun will burn out, or there will be no drinking water anymore, and then we'll ask artificial intelligence to help. That's why the title is *Why So Serious, Cassandra*? Why do we have to see these Cassandraic visions? AI will only be another tool."

At one point, Duda considered naming the album *OK AI*, as a nod to Radiohead's classic *OK Computer*.

"But then I realised that *AFR AI D* is much more me because I write about fear and anxiety all the time, and it's stronger. It's catchy and I can play games with the words inside of that, so I think it's better," he says.

Speaking of names, Duda's solo project could have been called *Eye Of The Soundscape*, after the 2016 Riverside album that saw the group experimenting with electronic music, but the death of Riverside guitarist Piotr Grudziński led to Duda abandoning that idea.

"Everything didn't have a meaning anymore," he says, ruefully.

Then, with *Lockdown Spaces* in 2020, the time felt right to release music under his own name.

"I was considering a project name, but then I realised Mariusz Duda would be much more well known," he says. "I started my solo career in 2008 under the name Lunatic Soul not because I was not ready to release music under my own name, but I knew that people love bands. But I didn't want to sound exactly like Riverside. I'm the main composer in Riverside. This is not a band that's full of compromises; no, we're realising my own vision. That's why

> "I grew up on Tangerine Dream, Jean-Michel Jarre, Vangelis. Later on, Mike Oldfield and later, *later* on, progressive music."

AFR AI D embraces the limitations of electronic music — the only conventional instrumentation comes from the guitar solos performed by Riverside's tech, Mateusz Owczarek. However, with songtitles including *Taming Nightmares*, *Good Morning Fearmongering* and *Why So Serious, Cassandra?*, there are shared themes with Duda's work in Riverside.

Mariusz Duda is exploring new avenues.

under my own name I wanted to try totally different stuff."

That desire led Duda to make something from far out of left-field.

"That's why I decided to do something crazy like *Lockdown Spaces* that sounds like music from Atari [video-game brand popular in the late 70s/early 80s]. It was important to me because, first and foremost, I grew up on those video games, and secondly, I wanted to try something out musically."

Hence, no bass guitar, no conventional vocals, just strange, minimalist electronic music, even if Duda himself isn't the biggest fan of *Lockdown Spaces*.

"It's hard to listen to that album now," he says, suggesting that it was just about getting something out of his system. "I didn't want to create an album that everyone could listen to for many years. I was really selfish, but I needed that."

In addition to taming nightmares, making *AFR AI D* has helped Duda understand who he wants to be with this musical world he's created, and while he's not committed to performing this material live, he has ideas about how to do it.

"I enjoy electronic music, but I'm not enjoying hiding behind modulars and 15 keyboards, looking like Jean-Michel Jarre surrounded by all this electronic stuff," he says. "If I play this live, I'd choose a band, with drums, bass, guitar. Do electronic music but as a band just like Faithless did. I saw one of their shows live on television, knowing them from the albums, what the hell, this is so amazing! Live, it was a totally different band. So, I see myself playing my electronic music more like LCD Soundsystem or Groove Armada."

Duda conceives of his solo career as belonging to the realm of progressive electronic music, carving out his own space where soundscapes and melody interact.

> "I always write about loneliness, about struggling with things around me, about the trial of surviving these days, about fear and anxiety. All my albums are more like therapy, that's why I'm trying to record so many of them."

"It's more in this direction than ambient Brian Eno stuff or the Berlin school of Tangerine Dream," he says. "On *Lockdown Spaces*, on *Claustrophobic Universe*, I tried to be someone else, because I got rid of melodies. But melody is really important and on *AFR AI D,* I think on every song there are some melodic parts that are characteristic of my music. Why should I get rid of that? That's part of my soul."

After 20-plus years of Riverside, Duda feels he's unlikely to break out of the prog world to find an entirely new audience in electronica. But that doesn't mean staying in an artistic rut or not creating works that are satisfying on a personal level.

"You've got your loyal audience, your fans; you cannot afford to do things only for them," he says. "I do this electronic world mostly for myself, knowing it's not as popular as Riverside and Lunatic Soul, and I'm fine with that. My goal is not to be a competitor to my own musical projects. I just need genuine, organic development. Who knows what will happen in the future?"

AFR AI D is out now via Kscope.
See mariuszduda.md for more information.

***AFR AI D* is out now.**

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The Truth Is Out There

Almost a decade in the making, **Earthside**'s second album, *Let The Truth Speak,* finds the band in fine form. Yet the story of its creation and subsequent release has been peppered not just with world events, but personal battles. Singer/guitarist Jamie van Dyck and drummer Ben Shanbrom discuss how they rose to the challenges of creating a bold and healing cinematic sound that defies all expectation.

Words: Dom Lawson **Portrait:** Justin Borucki

The best laid plans of mice, men and progressive rock musicians can often go awry. When *Prog* speaks with Earthside, on the eve of their return to European stages at Euroblast in Germany and ProgPower in the Netherlands, they're only a handful of weeks on from the news that singer/guitarist Jamie van Dyck has been diagnosed with testicular cancer. Today, Jamie looks and sounds in good health and is less interested in bemoaning his lot than in enthusing about his band's return to the festival circuit, and their absolutely colossal new album, *Let The Truth Speak*.

"We delivered the mastered album to the label in May, and then I got the testicular cancer diagnosis [in September]," he notes with a shrug. "It's all happened very fast. It was as simple as just removing the cancerous testicle, and if it had healed up well enough I could go to Europe as planned. It did make rehearsing and preparing feel very last minute and very rushed. While I was recovering, I didn't want to stress myself out too much, so we didn't rehearse nearly as much as I think we would've wanted to."

"One of the advantages of being Facebook friends with progressive music fans is they know a lot of music, and they're music lovers who love music and musicianship in general."

Jamie van Dyke

He grins broadly, clearly just happy to be back.

"Luckily, when I write the music, I give the hard parts to everyone else!"

Released in October 2015, Earthside's debut, *A Dream In Static* was an instant hit with fans of modern, progressive heaviness. Van Dyck and his comrades clearly knew their way around a djent riff, but epics *Mob Mentality* and *Skyline* were anything but generic. With a gift for lavish arrangements and skilful genre blending, Earthside stood out as something special. Van Dyck admits he was taken aback by the enthusiastic response to the first album, but that a few lingering frustrations with how it turned out had taught the band to be ruthless in pursuit of their loftiest musical ambitions. *Let The Truth Speak* outstrips its predecessor on every level, veering from the snappy post-djent throwdown of *Pattern Of Rebirth* (featuring AJ Channer from Texan rap-metal crew Fire From The Gods) to the absurdly exciting prog-funk crossover sprawl of *The Lesser Evil*, which features soulful vocals from Larry Braggs, formerly of both The Temptations and Tower Of Power.

"Yeah, it is a much bigger album. Whether that was a wise choice or not, I don't know! But it definitely played a role in why it took as long as it did," says van Dyck with a laugh.

"Also, how layered it is, how collaborative it is, and the scope of

Earthside: always pushing the bar higher.

PRESS/MEG ALEXANDER

L-R: Jamie van Dyck, Ben Shanbrom, Frank Sacramone, Ryan Griffin.

people involved in making this record. It was a quest to find some of these people, some that we didn't know existed, but we got to a point of desperation where it had already been almost five years since we released *A Dream In Static* and we had barely any of the guest vocalists lined up."

They got it sorted in the end, it seems. Among the other notables chipping in on *Let The Truth Speak* are TesseracT frontman Daniel Tompkins, Canadian singer-songwriter Keturah and, brilliantly, former *Georgia's Got Talent* contestant Gennady Tkachenko-Papizh, who sings alongside Tompkins on the indulgent grandiloquence of the title track.

"One of the advantages of being Facebook friends with progressive music fans is they know a lot of music, and they're music lovers who love music and musicianship in general. They love great composers and they love great playing, so it's not just limited to the progressive music genre. So I wrote this post, asking for recommendations and asked everyone to focus on people outside of the prog names we already know, and I got over a thousand comments. Some were just recommending themselves or their bandmates, but some of them were recommending people from far corners of the music industry, like Gennady. Somebody had seen him on *...Got Talent*, and we wouldn't have known anything about that. Finding him completely gave an X-factor to a song that we thought was probably the best song on the record. We realised we could add that ingredient to it and it gave the song extra character and emotional weight."

Earthside are a generous lot. *Let The Truth Speak* is 78 minutes long and absolutely full of moments of audacious cross-pollination. Earthside are still a thunderous prog metal band at heart, but their second full-length has expanded their remit to include, well, just about anything that takes their collective fancy. From *The Lesser Evil*'s startling foray into funk, to *Denial's Aria*'s somnambulant trip-hop odyssey, *Let The Truth Speak* is what happens when great musicians stop giving a shit about the naysayers and aim as high as possible, and damn the consequences.

"People say, 'You're never gonna achieve perfection,'" says van Dyck. "Well, on the first record, when we could've got it closer to the way we wanted it, we didn't take the opportunity. We didn't want to feel that way again so this time we took eight years! Whenever there was that decision point, 'Do we get it closer to the way we want it, or do we just let it go?' We chose to pursue the way we wanted things to be. I actually think we've satisfied and satiated that compulsion now. We might've picked the wrong record to do it on! The follow-up to your debut is meant to be timely, from a strategic career standpoint, isn't it? [Laughs.]"

When Earthside's grand musical plans finally came together, they still needed to find something to write lyrics about. Fortunately, the last eight years have been a rollercoaster ride for the entire world. As drummer Ben Shanbrom notes, the introspective observations of *A Dream In Static* have evolved into an outward-looking concern for humankind and the planet.

"We still grapple with personal issues, but it seems there's a much wider and more pervasive problem, a number of problems, that are working out on a global scale and that are so much bigger than ourselves," he states. "I think that we can feel so insignificant in face of that, and it's just crippling and paralysing. How do you live on with all this happening? How do you move forward? The first record was very much an 'I' record. It was looking inward. This is a 'we' record. It's about humanity and the world around us."

"The pandemic deepened that feeling," adds van Dyck. "We'd already written most of the album by that point, but there were still some lyrics left to write. Maybe that's why it still works, as a 2023 album. Thank you, Covid, you made our album relevant! We wouldn't change a thing!"

Having 'fessed up to being mildly dissatisfied with the way their debut album turned out, Earthside are all the more eager to confirm that they are deeply, profoundly happy with *Let The Truth Speak*, and rather proud of themselves for being mad enough to attempt such an overblown project in the first place.

"When we wrapped the album up, there was a sense that, 'Okay, we're fucking psychos and we know we're psychos, but we know that this has cleared the bar!'" says Shanbrom. "Without any shadow of a doubt, we got it over the finish line to the degree of quality we wanted. On future recordings, we just want to have a more efficient process and to separate ourselves a bit from the mystique of the tortured artist!"

"We also have to trust that we can make something special *without* all this opulence," concludes van Dyck. "That grandness and largesse of sound are important parts of who we are and there are multiple ways to achieve that, but it's not the only thing that we bring to the table. So we need to trust that we can create something meaningful without having to torture ourselves over eight years again! But right now, everything we do feels like a win. We're just stoked to be here."

"Without any shadow of a doubt, we got it over the finish line to the degree of quality we wanted."
Ben Shanbrom

Latest album, ***Let The Truth Speak.***

Let The Truth Speak is out now via Music Theories Recordings/Mascot. See www.earthsideband.com for more.

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"In my head I wanted to be in Genesis, I wanted to be in It Bites. I was living the dream as a teenager and there was no second-guessing what I was going to write. So, there's a lovely innocence with these tracks."
Rob Reed

In 2021, Magenta's Rob Reed relaunched his old band, **Cyan**, with a new line-up and a polished reimagining of *For King And Country*. They've now teamed up again to tackle *Pictures From The Other Side*. Reed and vocalist Peter Jones tell *Prog* about bringing a new lease of life to old material and why there's more to come.

Words: Chris Cope
Portrait: Chris Jones

"I knew the songs were good back in the day," Cyan mainman Rob Reed says of his band's original releases, from back in the 1990s. "But they just needed to be reworked. A lot of people would go back and remix the album or tinker with it, but this is a major rebuilding, throwing out sections and writing new ones. Some of the tracks are unrecognisable, some less so. I just enjoy fixing things, and hearing them with the full production."

Reed is speaking down the phone from his studio in Wales on the cusp of Cyan's latest release, a reworking of their 1994 album *Pictures From The Other Side*. The premise is fairly simple: with a new line-up, let's rearrange, reimagine and rework the album, and record it on much better gear.

Reed and co already gave Cyan's 1993 debut, *For King And Country*, a 21st-century makeover a few years ago, and they've decided it's now time to have a bash at their follow-up record. It smacks of a job-well-done, with the album's evolution fascinating to see. After three records in the 90s, the multi-instrumentalist stopped Cyan and locked it away in the filing cabinet while reaching to the stars with his ongoing project, Magenta.

"I've always loved the tracks I wrote for the Cyan albums," Reed says now. "I've always sort of thought, 'What would they sound like with all the modern production?' The studio I've got now is out of this world. And it's also to solve the mistakes in the composition as well. I listen back to stuff and think, 'Oh God, I wish I had written it like this.'"

Today's Cyan are a completely different proposition from the 90s version – not

The ever-evolving Cyan. L-R: Luke Machin, Rob Reed, Jiffy Griffiths, Peter Jones, Dan Nelson.

Back To The Future

In perfect harmony: no egos, just great music.

ANDREW LAWSON

least in the line-up, which features Tiger Moth Tales and Camel's Peter Jones on vocals. Also on board are guitarist Luke Machin from The Tangent, and Magenta/ex-Godsticks bassist Dan Nelson. Drum duties are shared between Tim Robinson and Magenta's Jiffy Griffiths, who performs live.

"After being in so many bands, I can't cope with any egos," Reed says as he lauds his musical comrades. "I'm really lucky that we've got these players together. There's no ego there, but they're great players, which I love."

The spark that launched Reed's quest to rework the band's old material came when the musician heard Jones sing Cyan material for the first time.

"That was the moment when I thought it was going to work," he explains. "Up until that point I was tinkering away. I had some of the files from the original recordings, I had MIDI files of some of the keyboards. People would say to me, 'When are you going to re-release the three Cyan albums?' I was tempted to repackage them, but I thought, 'What if I was to throw the kitchen sink at it, production-wise and technology-wise?' But the moment was definitely when Pete sang it, it just transformed it.

"For me, something that's neglected in prog in general is the vocalist. Everyone is far more concerned about how clever the guitarist is or the drummer, and how mad the music is. But, for me, the two things are melody and the vocalist because the vocalist is what connects with the listener. I've been lucky with Magenta to have one of the best female singers with Christina [Booth], and now with Cyan with Pete, he's one of the best male singers."

Jones is just as happy to be working with Reed, whom he's known for around a decade. He was first approached about joining the refreshed Cyan back in 2018, and is now an integral cog in the machine.

"It's been a long process to get it going, but here we are," Jones reflects. "I think Cyan was kind of a bit of a cult thing when they came out, they had a really dedicated following. But this was in the 90s, when there wasn't much new prog getting off the ground back then. There's a lot of people that still fondly remember the originals. I hope that they think the new ones are good as well."

> "It's nice to keep that sense of the innocence of the originals, but to add our collective musical experience. You get the best of both worlds."
>
> **Peter Jones**

It's hard to believe early converts won't be won over; the grand sound and production of the band's reworked second album is a world away from the rather rudimentary set-up that underpinned the 90s original. Reed admits that his early gear was "so basic" — citing Casio keyboards as an example — as he couldn't afford high-range equipment.

"I would never have dreamt back then that I would have the gear that I have now," he says. "What these songs had was a real innocence, which I've lost having done music for so long and made so many albums. When I was writing this stuff I wasn't thinking about what the fans are going to think, or what the press are going to think, or what the reviews are going to be like. In my head, I wanted to be in Genesis, I wanted to be in It Bites.

"I was living the dream as a teenager and there was no second-guessing what I was going to write. So, there's a lovely innocence with these tracks. I just did what I wanted really, and that's something I've lost, and it's really hard to get it back."

Jones agrees that there's a certain purity in the original Cyan recordings that reflects the period in which they were released.

"There is that sense of, some might say, naïvety, but I'd prefer to say there's a very youthful quality to the songs, to the music — a very sort of innocent quality to it," he says, "because it was all written back when Rob was

in his teens. It's refreshing to revisit that, and I find it very invigorating to perform the songs live as well. It's nice to keep that sense of the innocence of the originals, but to add our collective musical experience. You get the best of both worlds."

The history of Cyan goes back to the 1980s and school sixth form, when Reed had a sparkle in his eye and dreamed of a speckled career in progressive music. Rehearsals would take place in the school hall, usually used for assemblies, and Reed would write material on the piano there when there were no lessons on.

"I remember that we all cobbled together £5 each and borrowed the extra fiver to get 30 quid to go into a local studio that had opened up," he adds. "And from a bunch of kids from Rhondda Valley [a former coal-mining region in south Wales], to go into a recording studio… and then to actually record something and then go back into the control room and hear it back on these big monitors. It was, like, 'God, we sound like Genesis!' It was so mind-blowing."

It wasn't until they released their last album, *The Creeping Vine*, in 1999 that Cyan began to make an impact, by which point the project had all but fizzled out. Reed had teamed up with vocalist Christina Booth for the left-leaning pop act Trippa, who landed mainstream TV performances, before returning to his prog roots with Magenta. After the pop dream died it was with Magenta that Reed truly gained steam, pushing out a multitude of studio albums, live releases and DVDs.

With one Cyan album left to reimagine, Reed is unsure about when that may come to be, especially as he tends to flit between projects. However, there's another release in the pipeline of leftover material from the new *Pictures From The Other Side* sessions, which should help to keep things ticking over. There's also the prospect of more live shows.

"What happened with this new album [was that] there were eight songs on the original, and by the time I'd finished reworking them all it had gone from like 60 minutes to up to like 85 minutes," he explains. "Somehow I'd written an extra 25 minutes of material within the songs, and it was way too long to go onto one record. So, we've taken two tracks off, and that's still running at 55/60 minutes. And then we're going to release a mini album in March that will have this epic 25-minute track on it that was way too big to go on the album.

"But I'm exhausted by it now. I don't want to do any more recording for a while and it's good for me, because doing all my various other projects… I do a Cyan album, I get exhausted and sick of it by the end, then I go and do a Magenta record because that's new and fresh. And then I do an album with that and get sick of it, and then I go and do my solo records. So jumping from each of these things allows me to recharge my musical batteries."

Another key part of Reed's busy life is releasing music through his two labels, Tigermoth Records and White Knight. He says that unlike some other "parasite" labels and distributors, his ventures give artists the lion's share of the income.

"Spotify is the final nail in the coffin, for me," Reed adds. "I refuse to put my stuff on it, because it's so bad [for royalties]. What I've noticed is that music is undervalued. A lot of people begrudge paying over £10 for an album, but will go and pay for two cappuccinos in Starbucks. And someone spends a year and a half making an album. It's so undervalued, but it brings so much to people. The genie is out of the bottle, so there's nothing you can do."

Reed believes that £10 for an album is "scandalous" given that it's work of art, but adds that the prog community are lucky to have devoted fans keen on paying for a physical product. However, despite the bloodsucking nature of the industry and the issue of many valuing coffee more than a CD or vinyl, Reed is thankful just to be making, and releasing, music as his day job — and long may it continue.

"Every day I count my blessings," the multi-instrumentalist says. "I'm so lucky to be able to make music 24/7. That's all I do. A lot of other musicians have got to do second jobs and stuff, but I'm lucky, and I appreciate it as if it's a contract between me and the fans that buy my music in whatever guise that I put out. Hopefully they know that I will put everything — financially and personally — into making a record as good as I can. That seems to work at the moment, and I rejoice every day for that situation."

Pictures From The Other Side is out now via Tigermoth Records. See www.cyancd.co.uk for more.

SECOND BASE

Despite pursuing multiple projects already, three prog luminaries have concluded they're simply not busy enough. As **D'Virgilio, Morse & Jennings** press the button on their cunningly titled *Sophomore*, *Prog* catches up with two-thirds of the group to find out how they're packing everything in and whether they're likely to make it a hat-trick of albums.

Words: Paul Ging **Images:** Chad Hoerner

"That's quite the look, Neal!" cackles Nick D'Virgilio to his buddy Neal Morse as the Zoom call kicks in.

The former Spock's Beard and current D'Virgilio, Morse & Jennings compadres explode with laughter on first sight of each other, always a good sign, even when the interviewees already have reputations for being distinctly non-prickly. The reason for the mirth is Morse's wide-brimmed blue hat and matching waterproof poncho. They're joining *Prog* to talk about the "trio's" (as Morse likes to call them) quickly realised second album, *Sophomore*. Morse has tied in a family road trip with his sister's birthday celebration in the San Francisco Bay area, travelling from his home in Nashville. He joins us from a famous Nevada beauty spot.

"It's morning in Lake Tahoe and I'm sitting by the campfire, dude!" he explains to D'Virgilio.

The Big Big Train drummer, meanwhile, is joining us from Sweetwater Studios in Fort Wayne, Indiana, where he works as a session vocalist, drummer and engineer. With the pair happy to see each other and nicely warmed up, we dive straight in to tackle the strangest thing about a group with such apparently organic vocal harmony perfection: the trio have only ever been gathered together in the same place twice.

"Yeah," says Morse, "this was all file sharing like the first [album] because of logistics, but also it's an 'If it ain't broke don't fix it' kinda thing. I think we were all very happy with the way the first album turned out, so why not [continue in that way]? There was something kinda graceful and easy with the way it's come together and I'm really pleased with both records."

The second of the two occasions that they've all been together was quite recently, with the intention of getting the promotional gears turning, according to D'Virgilio: "We went to shoot a couple of videos in Neal's studio in Nashville. Ross had just finished his run of dates in the States with Haken and flew down."

Together at last! Ross Jennings, Nick D'Virgilio, Neal Morse.

"I would love to take this on the road someday. I think it's a really fun little project and I think we could make a really nice evening's music."

Nick D'Virgilio

Ah yes, Ross Jennings. Forming a band with two ex-Spock's guys, especially a project with a pronounced 70s West Coast feel, one wouldn't necessarily think of a relatively young English prog metaller as the missing ingredient. But Morse explains how Jennings was foremost in his thoughts.

"I'd just watched him in the *Absolute Universe* video [*The Final Flight: Live At L'Olympia* concert film by Morse-fronted prog supergroup Transatlantic]. They'd had the idea to have us interviewed by our peers. I watched Ross interviewing [drummer] Mike Portnoy, so Ross was in my head. We'd actually been talking for weeks [about] who should be the third guy? And I didn't know if Ross would be interested or into this kind of music at all. But I sent him an email and he was like, 'Dude! You have no idea! I'm a huge fan of acoustic music and country and all that kind of thing.' So it just fell into place in a beautiful way."

***Sophomore*: vocal harmonies galore!**

This well-rested trio are back for more.

"Yeah, sort of like the first record, I thought it'd be cool to have a little bit more of a rockier, high-energy 'toon'," says Morse. "*Second Hand Sons* was the one on the first record that had that rock edge, so that was part of the inspiration. I started off with the guitar riff and I started thinking about my mom and that opened the floodgates!"

"Basically, it's a tribute to mothers," adds D'Virgilio. "If you're lucky enough to have a great relationship with your mom, as I do and I know Neal did and I think Ross does as well, moms do a lot for us from when we're little kids all the way into our adult lives. That's where [this song] stems from. So, the first verse is looking at our mothers when we're young kids. They're still young women and they take care of everything and they do everything for you. Then, when you're a teenager — that's the second verse — you try to get away with a lot of things. You think you can fool your mom, but you can't! Our friend Tommy was working in the Reeperbahn [an area known for its venues and bars] on this Beatles cover band gig and invited us, so some of us went and I just had Beatles songs in my head. I was thinking about *Help*, and about John crying out for help, so that had something to do with *The Weary One*. But mainly, I was just sitting in a hotel room feeling really tired!"

Both Morse and D'Virgilio, who've doubtless had a few exhausted moments while touring, laugh hard.

Despite their other commitments, DMJ are already at album number two, just a year and a half after the first. *Prog* wonders if it's now a long-term project?

D'Virgilio is all for it: "I sure hope so! The guys know my feelings about it. I would love to take this on the road someday. I think it's a really fun little project and I think we could make a really nice evening's music doing this kind of stuff and throw in a few extra little bits and bobs. So, in my mind, we can pull that off one of these days. I see a third record coming, because the records are really easy to make, at least the first two have been. So long as we have the songs and we have time to throw things together back and forth, I hope it can last for as long as it can last!"

One of DMJ's primary inspirations is Crosby, Stills & Nash. Graham Nash's proud English tones added to that unit's uniqueness. Did they think they needed an Englishman for DMJ's vocal blend, or was it just a coincidence? Their reaction suggests the latter.

D'Virgilio laughs with surprise at the thought. "I guess a coincidence more than anything else, really!"

Morse looks intrigued. "Y'know, I'd never even thought about that until this moment!"

So, it seems having the same international composition as CSN wasn't pre-planned. But perhaps the difference in pronunciation, in projection, subtly adds to DMJ's vocal mix in a similar way, giving it the same compelling quality that it did to one of their key influences. As well as the outstanding harmonies on *Sophomore*, there are rockier moments. For example, Morse's *Mama* sticks out as stylistically edgier.

> **"I thought it'd be cool to have a little bit more of a rockier, high-energy 'toon'."**
> **Neal Morse**

"The bridge is about how you love each other and the last verse is when you're an older person and your mother's older and even at that stage, she's still got your back! She still supports you and will take on the world for you, no matter how old she is. It turned out to be a fun track!"

Equally as successful, musically, is *The Weary One*. Written by Morse in Hamburg, the old stomping ground of the pre-fame Fab Four, it has an indirect Beatles influence.

Says Morse, "I was on the Neal Morse Band tour for [2021 album] *Innocence & Danger* and had a day off in Hamburg.

Morse agrees. "For me, it's a lovely outlet. I love this kind of music and I don't really have [another] outlet for it. Nick and Ross are so wonderful, it's a real gift to have people like that to sing with, even though [we're doing it] without singing together in the room. When we did sing together in the room, it was like, [his face brightens] 'Oh yeah!' It was funny how the magic was there, just like on the records!"

Let's hope these sophomores are laughing all the way to graduation.

Sophomore is out now via InsideOutMusic. See www.insideoutmusic.com for more information.

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THE PROG INTERVIEW

FRANCIS DUNNERY

Every month we get inside the mind of one of the biggest names in music. This issue it's **Francis Dunnery**. Best known for co-founding and fronting It Bites during their 80s heyday, his career has since taken in collaborations with Robert Plant, Carlos Santana and members of Yes, and he even auditioned for Genesis. Now back on the road with It Bites FD, the multimedia artist looks back over his life so far and shares his plans for the future.

Words: Dave Ling

It Bites FD's recently released Live From The Black Country.

In 1993, as sidekick to former Led Zeppelin frontman Robert Plant, Francis Dunnery had what he now calls "the biggest guitar job in the world". He knew it wouldn't last forever, but three decades later the kid from Egremont in Cumbria still gets a kick from remembering that he played the guitar solo to *Whole Lotta Love* in stadiums across the world.

During the previous decade, Dunnery's band It Bites had been loved by fans and hated by the press over the course of three resolutely fascinating albums that to this day still stand up as masterpieces. Formed in 1982, It Bites enjoyed chart success in '86 with *Calling All The Heroes* but just a few years later, the guitarist and singer dismayed and puzzled his bandmates by opting to walk away for a solo career.

Defined by his unpredictability, the self-confessed "live wire" has been an independent artist and record label owner for many years, and he prefers it that way. Back in 2021 he released a 42-song, triple-disc solo album entitled *The Big Purple Castle* and his most recent release, the Blu-ray/CD set *Live From The Black Country*, sees him performing some of It Bites' best-loved material in Wolverhampton. As well as fronting his own incarnation of It Bites, Francis Dunnery has a pure blues side-band called Tombstone Dunnery. Away from music, he's a student of astrology and Jungian psychology.

Your father was a musician and your brother Baz played guitar for the noted Cumbrian rock band Necromandus, so when did you first become aware of progressive music?

There was a lot of jazz fusion around: Herbie Hancock, Chick Corea, Isotope, Soft Machine and the Mahavishnu Orchestra, mixed in with the blues of Muddy Waters. In our house it was just as normal to listen to the Mahavishnu Orchestra as David Cassidy. My brother was heavily into Yes, so that would have been the first real progressive rock I knew.

You came from a household of binge-drinkers. Did your volatile home life influence the way your personality developed?

That situation taught me two sides of life: one being paradise – when sober, my parents were the most amazing, kind and gregarious people – and the other being when the drink kicked in, and they just disappeared. They went from making apple pies to vanishing completely. That was depressing. I later spent 35 years studying Jungian psychology, which taught me that whenever anything is going well, it always comes to an end.

It Bites were such an interesting band because the four of you genuinely were schoolmates.

Bob Dalton [drums] was the very first person I met in junior school at five years old. I love all of those guys, I spent some of the best times of my life with them. All of them are decent human beings. We went from starving in London, stealing milk from people's steps, all the way to playing huge venues.

> "I can sing Peter Gabriel better than Peter Gabriel but I just can't do Phil Collins... all that screaming on *Mama*, no way."

How did the band end up signed to Virgin Records?

We were living in a squat in Peckham [south-east London], sending cassette tapes of us playing live to the labels, and Paul Morley [the former *NME* writer who became a part of ZTT Records] was the only one that replied, saying that we needed to make proper demo tapes. So we decided to go and see the labels but at Warner Bros the security wouldn't let us in. There was a bit of a kerfuffle going on and this guy called Martyn Mayhead from Modern Media happened to see it all, gave me his card, and said to give him a ring. So we called him at three o'clock the following morning [Dunnery laughs] and he loved the tape. Martyn started to fund us, and that led to Virgin signing us.

Tombstone Dunnery, Francis' beloved blues project.

PRESS/FRANCIS DUNNERY

GEORGE CHIN/ICONICPIX

Live wire Francis Dunnery has had one helluva career to date!

Did the Top 10 success of the 1986 single *Calling All The Heroes* scupper hope of It Bites being viewed as a credible rock band?
Not really. If it wasn't for that song nobody would have heard of us. We were doing progressive rock, which was the most unhip thing you could think of. But we weren't a band trying to manipulate the public, we knew nothing about things like hit records. We just wanted to be like Yes, Genesis, Mahavishnu, UK and Focus. We had zero interest in being in the charts. I still think that if the person I am now could talk to It Bites back then, we could have had four hits from each of our albums.

1988's *Once Around The World*.

With a few notable exceptions, the music critics of the era didn't get It Bites and, frustrated by those perceptions, you often lambasted them from the stage.
I felt insulted by those idiots. If someone punches me in the face, I'll punch them back. I'm an old northern boy, still the same today, though having said that, I'm a very nice man. I'll do anything for you, I just won't be anybody's bitch. I'm an alpha male. Come at me – I'll knock you out. I don't care, I'll be dead in 30 years.

During the making of the second It Bites album, *Once Around The World*, Virgin brought in Steve Hillage as a producer. Was it in a bid to steady the ship of what you once described to *Prog* as "four incredibly raw lunatics who were drunk and stoned 24 hours a day"?
That's how we were back then. Although we thought we could, we didn't have the capacity to produce ourselves. Steve made us realise that we needed to write some three-minute singles because one of the songs [the title track] was almost 16 minutes long. Steve was a gentle soul. He did a great job on our stuff. I really, really loved working with him.

It Bites in June 1985.
BRIAN RASIC/GETTY IMAGES

ROB MONK/FUTURE OWNS

Was Hillage's calming influence what the situation required?
Yeah. *Midnight, Black December, Kiss Like Judas, Yellow Christian.* Steve helped with the mechanics of those songs.

It Bites seemed to be turning things around by the late 1980s, but despite having headlined London's Hammersmith Odeon, the band combusted in Los Angeles during the preparation of a fourth album. What happened?
There are a million different answers I could give you. We

Fearless: from a *Prog* photoshoot in 2013.

were under a lot of pressure to come up with huge success when nobody really knew what we should be doing. All we were being told was: "No, that's not right," or, "No, you can't do that." Towards the end of It Bites there was a lot of trying to make the sun shine when it was raining. It became obvious that we just didn't fit into what was going on within the industry. Nobody wanted us. It was like being English in a Welsh bar.

How did it affect you?

The most profound thing was realising that it didn't matter the kind of music we were making. The music side of things was the least important. That was the saddest thing. Walking away from all of that felt very liberating. I've got a brash personality and that didn't help. I was still drinking and I didn't have very good social skills. I was too much of a live wire and in that sense I contributed to my own downfall.

What was it like to sing backing vocals on the Anderson Bruford Wakeman Howe album in 1989?

That happened because we [It Bites] were being managed by Brian Lane, who managed Yes. Some may disagree but I always thought of Brian as another great guy. I already knew Jon [Anderson] and the band, and later on I was in a band [The Syn] with Chris [Squire]. What a fantastic experience that was. Dude, I was 25 years old and on a Yes album!

How did you end up joining Robert Plant's band?

It Bites had toured with Robert, and I have a good relationship with him because I think I'm as spunky and aggressive as he'd like to be. In the book about Robert [*Robert Plant: A Life* by Paul Rees], Chris Hughes [producer of *Fate Of Nations*] said, "There's nobody that excites Robert Plant more as a guitarist than Francis Dunnery." He likes the way I go at [the instrument], so we always get on well.

In those two or three years we spent together I got to do things I could never have done otherwise. Staying in big hotels, playing massive stadiums and flying first class, I went to the top of the hill. At that time it was the biggest guitar job in the world and for a while it was mine. It made me feel complete.

What did touring with Plant teach you?

It gave me an education in the blues: Robert knows everything about the blues. That's where my blues band, Tombstone Dunnery, comes from. I love the name Tombstone Dunnery, it's the best blues name in the world.

What else did you learn from that time in your life?

I didn't apply for that job, which made me realise that I'm not very effective at strategies. I see others making plans and going from A to B and it makes me think, "Wow!" In my life I tend to get blown around in the wind, I end up in the most

Tombstone Dunnery's new album.

fantastic places that nobody could even imagine. I didn't want the job with Robert, I wasn't after it and there were 5,000 guys that were, but they called me up and that was it. When things come into your life embrace them, and when they leave let them go – simple.

You once told me the story: "I went out on the razz with Motörhead and awoke on Hollywood Boulevard wearing a black wedding dress. I think it was an album launch of theirs, but I was so wasted from booze and blow that I can't be certain. And it wasn't just the wedding dress, someone had a gun at my head. That was it. I had to get sober."
[Roars with laughter.] Every word is true. I realised at that point that I was out of my league. I come from a place where you punch people in the face. With a gun in your face you think, "Aaah. That's enough partying."

So you cleaned up in 1991?
Oh, it's 33 or 34 years [ago].

> "I've got a brash personality and that didn't help. I was still drinking and I didn't have very good social skills. I was too much of a live wire and in that sense I contributed to my own downfall."

In 1996 you reportedly declined the chance to audition as lead singer for the role in Genesis that eventually went to Ray Wilson...
That's not true. I *did* audition for them though I knew I wouldn't get the job. I can sing Peter Gabriel better than Peter Gabriel but I just can't do Phil Collins... all that screaming on *Mama*, no way. Singing Genesis is all about the phrasing, you don't add blues because it's like classical music. So I knew I wouldn't get it, but I wasn't about to turn down the chance to go to Genesis' studio, sit there and sing *The Lamb Lies Down On Broadway*. And you know what? I believe I was the best man for the job because I'm creative enough to make Tony Banks angry. Tony is an Aries; with nobody to fight with he's no good. I wouldn't back down to any of those guys because I'm incredibly creative, probably more than they are.

It's a shame that didn't happen.
Mike [Rutherford] said something about *Watcher Of The Skies* having an awkward riff and a stupid lyric. Dude, that's why we like it, because it isn't a three-minute pop song. Mike wants to be like Mike + The Mechanics: nice, soft music when Genesis should be *The Battle Of Epping Forest*. I would never fit into that.

How did you come to appear on the track *Do You Like The Way?* from Santana's 1999 all-star record, *Supernatural*?
I've been on a few big albums in my time. That happened after I played on *The Miseducation Of Lauryn Hill* [the '98 solo album from the rapper-singer of the same name]. She was working to a deadline and I had a reputation as the guitarist of the moment in New York City. Lauren set me up for the Santana album but I didn't meet Carlos, sadly.

For two years you retired from music, only to change your mind. Why was that?
I just became disillusioned with the things you need to do to survive in this industry, and it gets progressively worse. It Bites was four guys fully committed to music, we weren't interested in money or success. I'd wanted to take the album *Man* [released by Dunnery's own label, Aquarian Nation, in 2001] to Danny Goldberg [the former manager of Nirvana] but he wouldn't have a meeting with me – he insisted I send in a cassette. I didn't want that, so I set up a meeting with Michael Cooper from Artemis Records, who I knew from my time on Atlantic, and when Danny found out I was seeing Michael he made Michael cancel the meeting – while I was in the room. The power plays are brutal. One day I will see Danny again. But that incident made me set up my own record label.

2001's *Man* album.

You were among the first artists to appreciate the importance of the internet, weren't you?
I had an email address in 1992.

Artistically speaking, that independence now allows you to do whatever you want.
One's ability to be realistic about where one is is all that

Blond with ambition: Francis Dunnery in 1989.

MICHAEL PUTLAND/GETTY IMAGES

Dunnery: exciting Robert Plant and fans everywhere.

PRESS/LORRAINE POOLE

keeps me sane now. I'm 60 years old [Dunnery turned 61 on December 25] with a bald head and a pair of tits. I'm no longer prepared to go along with the game. I'm very confident in my own self, but I'm realistic and I accept what is.

Talking of It Bites, back in 2003 a short-lived reunion was initiated when John Beck, Bob Dalton and Dick Nolan joined you onstage during a solo gig at London's Union Chapel. Did you get as far as writing together?
Yeah, we did. The difficulty is in the hierarchy of things. It would help everybody to understand... Look, take a band like Japan, who I've followed for a long time. Listen to what David Sylvian did afterwards and there's a thread that continues. In every band there's somebody who carries the vision forward. It's not that the other guys aren't important because they do contribute, but there's a guy like George Michael [in Wham!] and Freddie Mercury [in Queen]. It's not that Brian May isn't important, but the vision came from Freddie. When there's somebody that doesn't want to go along with that vision, a breakdown always follows. So, we did try to get It Bites back together a couple of times but the guys wouldn't accept my vision. I'm driven, I'll do more in a day than others do in a month. I'm the one getting everyone else out of bed.

It Bites reconvened without you in 2006, using John Mitchell to fill the gap for the first of two albums. How did you feel at the time?
I don't think I really cared. It was like someone banging my ex-wife — why would I want to listen to that? I've moved on. But I won't have anything bad said about John Mitchell because I love the guy.

For the past few years you've embraced your history in It Bites. What is it about the songs featured on your new CD/Blu-ray, *Live In The Black Country*, that draws you back?
Steve Hackett was to blame for that. When I worked with him on *Genesis Revisited II* [in 2012] I asked why he was going backwards and he replied that he was a part of something that people had a lot of love for. He wanted to keep it alive. The more I thought about that, the more sense it made. At the start I didn't really treat things with the respect they deserved, those early tours were an excuse to visit my family, but the last few years it's got better and better.

Could there be a studio record from your version of It Bites?
We started recording it at Rockfield Studios in December. It Bites FD — the FD is important.

And what about the original band?
Well, if someone offered five million dollars to make an album, why not?

You've worked with Big Big Train and Steve Hackett. Where do you stand on the legitimacy of prog rock in 2024?
To be honest, most of it's a caricature but there are always artists with perspective. *The Battle Of Epping Forest*, *Harold The Barrel*, *Supper's Ready* and *Roundabout* are all completely pointless — prog rock is pointless, but we love it because it's escapism. Don't take that as a negative.

You once said: "I got booed offstage a few times, but that's been my career. I really don't mind getting booed, because I'm not frightened of what an audience thinks of me." It's a brave statement.
Most artists are very concerned with what their audience thinks about them but I've got 35 years of psychology under my belt. I'm doing my thing, you're very welcome to come and watch it but I won't go around with a begging bowl. I'm completely unfazed by what others think about me making a new It Bites album. I don't want to get to 90 years old and think, "I wish I'd done that."

Live From The Black Country is out now via Tigermoth Records. It Bites FD tour the UK in January 2024. See francisdunnery.com for more information.

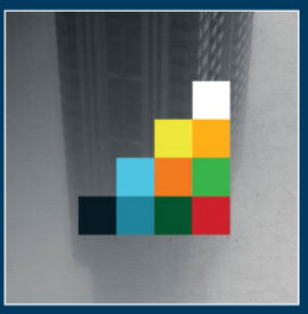
PROG CRITICS' CHOICE 2023

It's that time again for the *Prog* writers' albums of the year. Culled from the magazine's reviews pages, our list shows, we think, that it's been another extraordinarily creative year for progressive music. As always, we look forward to reading your thoughts on the results.

"Thank you so much! Listening habits might be broadly changing, but I'm still in love with the idea of an album as a musical journey, or a piece of cinema for the ears, so it's wonderful to be reminded that I'm not alone!"

Steven Wilson

PRESS/HAJO MUELLER



1 STEVEN WILSON THE HARMONY CODEX (VIRGIN/SW RECORDS)

WE SAID: "The most immersive representation of his artistic palate to date."

- Polly Glass, *Prog* 144

2 THE FIERCE & THE DEAD NEWS FROM THE INVISIBLE WORLD (SPENCER PARK MUSIC)

WE SAID: "Entering a new phase of their creative contract with each other and their audience."

- Sid Smith, *Prog* 141

3 GONG UNENDING ASCENDING (KSCOPE)

WE SAID: "Shows that Gong's mission to explore music's outer reaches is far from over."

- Joe Banks, *Prog* 144

4 PETER GABRIEL I/O (REAL WORLD)

WE SAID: "The world has changed since 2002, mostly for the worst, but it's a better place with *i/o* in it."

- Jeremy Allen, *Prog* 145

5 CROWN LANDS
FEARLESS (SPINEFARM)

WE SAID: "*Fearless* is fantastic. And it sure beats the hell out of *Caress Of Steel*."

- Fraser Lewry, *Prog* 139

9 KATATONIA
SKY VOID OF STARS (NAPALM)

WE SAID: "The melodic hooks of this powerful, intricate record dig in with repeated plays."

- Paul Ging, *Prog* 136

13 HAWKWIND
THE FUTURE NEVER WAITS (CHERRY RED)

WE SAID: "The battered vessel looks and sounds as good as it has ever done."

- Jeremy Allen, *Prog* 139

17 ENSLAVED
HEIMDAL (NUCLEAR BLAST)

WE SAID: "This is yet another unequivocal triumph for the gods' most dedicated cheerleaders."

- Dom Lawson, *Prog* 136

6 TESSERACT
WAR OF BEING (KSCOPE)

WE SAID: "On *War Of Being* the band have never sounded more ferociously aware of their own identity."

- Phil Weller, *Prog* 143

10 TREVOR RABIN
RIO (INSIDEOUTMUSIC)

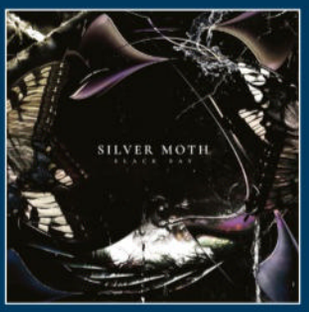
WE SAID: "It's very identifiably the work of the man who had his hand on the creative tiller of Yes from 1983 to 1995."

- Paul Ging, *Prog* 143

14 VOYAGER
FEARLESS IN LOVE (SEASON OF MIST)

WE SAID: "The most compelling and energised music of their career."

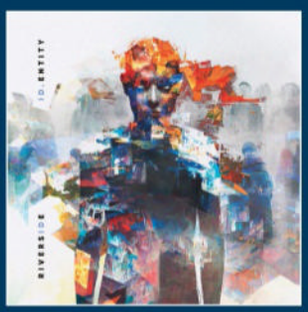
- David West, *Prog* 142



18 SILVER MOTH
BLACK BAY (BELLA UNION)

WE SAID: "An excellent cinematic entrée where the high quality of the results seem to have even surprised its creators."

- Jo Kendall, *Prog* 139



7 RIVERSIDE
ID.ENTITY (INSIDEOUTMUSIC)

WE SAID: "Brings fresh ideas to the table without compromising what made Riverside so likeable in the first place."

- Phil Weller, *Prog* 136

11 GREEN LUNG
THIS HEATHEN LAND (NUCLEAR BLAST)

WE SAID: "Proves that Sweden doesn't have the monopoly on the best retro revivalist bands."

- David West, *Prog* 144

15 MOON SAFARI
HIMLABACKEN VOL 2 (BLOMLIJUD)

WE SAID: "Moon Safari can consider *Himlabacken Vol 2* a very worthy successor."

- Paul Ging, *Prog* 145

19 SOLSTICE
LIGHT UP (GEP)

WE SAID: "Their second record with vocalist Jess Holland blends fusion and knotty prog tropes with broad, melodic strokes."

- Johnny Sharp, *Prog* 138

8 YES
MIRROR TO THE SKY (INSIDEOUTMUSIC)

WE SAID: "The best Yes album in 20 years. Maybe it's time to put down the placards and listen."

- Sid Smith, *Prog* 140

12 HAKEN
FAUNA (INSIDEOUTMUSIC)

WE SAID: "There are no cockroaches, but in their kingdom Haken remain pretty much near the top of the food chain."

- Gary Mackenzie, *Prog* 137

16 KING GIZZARD & THE LIZARD WIZARD
PETRODRAGONIC APOCALYPSE (KGLW)

WE SAID: "They make every genre they tackle fun."

- Grant Moon, *Prog* 141

20 EINAR SOLBERG
16 (INSIDEOUTMUSIC)

WE SAID: "Einar Solberg has penned an impressive and adventurous new chapter in his career. "

- Johnny Sharp, *Prog* 140

REISSUES

1 MARILLION
SEASONS END (DELUXE EDITION) (PARLOPHONE)

2 HAWKWIND
SPACE RITUAL (50TH ANNIVERSARY EDITION) (CHERRY RED)

3 RUSH
SIGNALS (40TH ANNIVERSARY) (UME/MERCURY)

4 GENESIS
BBC BROADCASTS (UMC)

5 DAVID LONGDON
WILD RIVER (ENGLISH ELECTRIC RECORDINGS)

6 PINK FLOYD
THE DARK SIDE OF THE MOON (50TH ANNIVERSARY) (PINK FLOYD RECORDS)

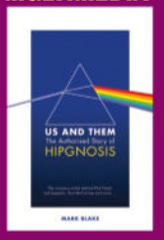
7 XTC
BIG EXPRESS (THE SURROUND SOUND SERIES) (PANEGYRIC)

8 JETHRO TULL
THE BROADSWORD AND THE BEAST (40TH ANNIVERSARY) (WARNER MUSIC)

9 GENTLE GIANT
INTERVIEW (STEVEN WILSON REMIX) (CHRYSALIS)

10 OPETH
DAMNATION (20TH ANNIVERSARY) (MUSIC FOR NATIONS)

MULTIMEDIA



1 US AND THEM: THE AUTHORISED STORY OF HIPGNOSIS
MARK BLAKE (NINE EIGHT BOOKS)

2 ADVENTURES IN MODERN RECORDING: FROM ABC TO ZTT
TREVOR HORN (NINE EIGHT BOOKS)

3 JOHN WETTON: AN EXTRAORDINARY LIFE
NICK SHILTON (ROCKET 88)

4 RUNNING UP THAT HILL: 50 VISIONS OF KATE BUSH
TOM DOYLE (NINE EIGHT BOOKS)

5 SQUARING THE CIRCLE: THE STORY OF HIPGNOSIS
ANTON CORBIJN (DOGWOOF)

6 MARK HOLLIS: A PERFECT SILENCE
BEN WARDLE (ROCKET 88)

7 HAVE YOU GOT IT YET? THE STORY OF SYD BARRETT & PINK FLOYD
STORM THORGERSON AND RODDY BOGAWA (MERCURY STUDIOS)

8 RUSH: PORTRAITS
FIN COSTELLO (RUFUS PUBLICATIONS)

9 PINK FLOYD: THE DARK SIDE OF THE MOON – THE OFFICIAL 50TH ANNIVERSARY BOOK
JILL FURMANOVSKY AND AUBREY POWELL (THAMES & HUDSON)

10 YES: THE TORMATO STORY
KEVIN MULRYNE (FIVE PER CENT FOR SOMETHING)

CRITICS' LISTS 2023

THE BEST THING I'VE HEARD ALL YEAR...

MARJANA SEMKINA (IAMTHEMORNING /MAER)

"**The Ocean** don't do the same thing over and over again and it's always interesting to see where they go next. *Holocene* shows growth and their desire for more electronic exploration, but it stays true to their complexity and crushing heaviness, both in sound and emotion, that I love."

JERRY EWING (Editor)

1 **VOYAGER** Fearless In Love *(SEASON OF MIST)*
2 **MOON SAFARI** Himlabacken Vol 2 *(BLOMLJUD)*
3 **GREEN LUNG** This Heathen Land *(NUCLEAR BLAST)*
4 **CROWN LANDS** Fearless *(SPINEFARM)*
5 **PETER GABRIEL** i/o *(REAL WORLD)*
6 **SILVER MOTH** Black Bay *(BELLA UNION)*
7 **THE FIERCE & THE DEAD** News From The Invisible World *(SPENCER PARK MUSIC)*
8 **STEVEN WILSON** The Harmony Codex *(VIRGIN/SW RECORDS)*
9 **LARS FREDRIK FRØISLIE** Fire Fortellinger *(KARISMA)*
10 **TREVOR RABIN** Rio *(INSIDEOUTMUSIC)*
11 **GOAT** Medicine *(ROCKET RECORDINGS)*
12 **ENSLAVED** Heimdal *(NUCLEAR BLAST)*
13 **TESSERACT** War Of Being *(KSCOPE)*
14 **KATATONIA** Sky Void Of Stars *(NAPALM)*
15 **BLOOD CEREMONY** The Old Ways Remain *(RISE ABOVE)*
16 **EINAR SOLBERG** 16 *(INSIDEOUTMUSIC)*
17 **HAKEN** Fauna *(INSIDEOUTMUSIC)*
18 **GALAHAD** The Long Goodbye *(AVALON)*
19 **KLONE** Meanwhile *(KSCOPE)*
20 **THE ANCHORET** It All Began With Loneliness *(WILLOWTIP)*

RUSSELL FAIRBROTHER (Art Editor)

1 **THE FIERCE & THE DEAD** News From The Invisible World *(SPENCER PARK MUSIC)*
2 **HEDVIG MOLLESTAD WEEJUNS** Weejuns *(RUNE GRAMMOFON)*
3 **CROWN LANDS** Fearless *(SPINEFARM)*
4 **JACOB HOLM-LUPO** Entire Of Itself *(APOLLON)*
5 **THE ANCHORESS** Versions *(DROWNED IN SOUND)*
6 **HAKEN** Fauna *(INSIDEOUTMUSIC)*
7 **GOAT** Medicine *(ROCKET RECORDINGS)*
8 **VVON DOGMA I** The Kvlt Of Glitch *(VVONDOGMAI.BANDCAMP.COM)*
9 **HAWKWIND** The Future Never Waits *(CHERRY RED)*
10 **RING VAN MÖBIUS** Commissioned Works Pt II – Six Drops Of Poison *(APOLLON)*
11 **SOFT MACHINE** Other Doors *(DYAD)*
12 **CREEP SHOW** Yawning Abyss *(BELLA UNION)*
13 **SOLSTICE** Light Up *(GEP)*
14 **GONG** Unending Descending *(KSCOPE)*
15 **DBA** Celestial Songs *(SPIRIT OF UNICORN MUSIC)*
16 **MOON SAFARI** Himlabacken Vol 2 *(BLOMLJUD)*
17 **HATS OFF GENTLEMEN IT'S ADEQUATE** The Light Of Ancient Mistakes *(GLASS CASTLE RECORDINGS)*
18 **PHILIP SELWAY** Strange Dance *(BELLA UNION)*
19 **GREEN LUNG** This Heathen Land *(NUCLEAR BLAST)*
20 **STEVEN WILSON** The Harmony Codex *(VIRGIN/SW RECORDS)*

CHAD HOERNER

ROSS JENNINGS (HAKEN)

"**Sleep Token** have a unique ability to fuse metal and pop with a contemporary, urban production. Led by one of the most emotive voices in the modern rock scene, it's the strength of the songwriting that truly counts on *Take Me To Eden*. Balancing simplicity with technical performances, it's one of 2023's stand-out records for me."

JULIAN MARSZALEK (News Editor)

1 **EMMA TRICCA** Aspirin Sun *(BELLA UNION)*
2 **MAUD THE MOTH + TRAJEDESALIVA** Bordando El Manto Terrestre *(TIME RELEASED SOUND)*
3 **CELESTIAL NORTH** Otherworldly *(1142994 RECORDS DK)*
4 **GOAT** Medicine *(ROCKET RECORDINGS)*
5 **HAWKWIND** The Future Never Waits *(CHERRY RED)*
6 **THE CORAL** Holy Joe's Coral Island Medicine Show *(RUN ON RECORDS)*
7 **KING GIZZARD & THE LIZARD WIZARD** PetroDragonic Apocalypse *(KGLW)*
8 **KAVUS TORABI & RICHARD WILEMAN** Heaven's Sun *(BELIEVERS ROAST)*
9 **STEVEN WILSON** The Harmony Codex *(VIRGIN/SW RECORDS)*
10 **GONG** Unending Ascending *(KSCOPE)*
11 **THEY WATCH US FROM THE MOON** Cosmic Chronicles, Act 1: The Ascension *(NEW HEAVY SOUNDS)*
12 **JEGONG** The Complex Inbetween *(PELAGIC)*
13 **LAURA LORIGA** Vever *(GOD UNKNOWN RECORDS)*
14 **OGIVES** La Mémoires Des Orages *(SUB ROSA)*
15 **BLOOD CEREMONY** The Old Ways Remain *(RISE ABOVE)*
16 **BEN REED** Bandaged *(ESOTERIC)*
17 **DAVID BREWIS** The Soft Struggles *(DAYLIGHT SAVING RECORDS)*
18 **THE WITCHING TALE** What Magic Is This? *(BELLISSIMA RECORDS)*
19 **ZAHN** Adria *(CRAZYSANE RECORDS)*
20 **HATS OFF GENTLEMEN IT'S ADEQUATE** The Light Of Ancient Mistakes *(GLASS CASTLE RECORDINGS)*

NATASHA SCHARF (Deputy Editor)

1. **PETER GABRIEL** i/o *(REAL WORLD)*
2 **KATATONIA** Sky Void Of Stars *(NAPALM)*
3 **VOYAGER** Fearless In Love *(SEASON OF MIST)*
4 **RIVERSIDE** ID.Entity *(INSIDEOUTMUSIC)*
5 **THE OCEAN** Holocene *(PELAGIC)*
6 **GODSTICKS** This Is What A Winner Looks Like *(KSCOPE)*
7 **MYRKUR** Spine *(RELAPSE)*
8 **SILVER MOTH** Black Bay *(BELLA UNION)*
9 **SOEN** Memorial *(SILVER LINING MUSIC)*
10 **TESSERACT** War Of Being *(KSCOPE)*
11 **EARTHSIDE** Let The Truth Speak *(MUSIC THEORIES)*
12 **STEVEN WILSON** The Harmony Codex *(VIRGIN/SW RECORDS)*
13 **HILARY WOODS** Acts Of Light *(SACRED BONES)*
14 **JOHN LUNN, EIVØR AND DANNY SAUL** The Last Kingdom – Destiny Is All *(A&G SONGS)*
15 **THE FIERCE & THE DEAD** News From The Invisible World *(SPENCER PARK MUSIC)*
16 **EINAR SOLBERG** 16 *(INSIDEOUTMUSIC)*
17 **KLONE** Meanwhile *(KSCOPE)*
18 **HAKEN** Fauna *(INSIDEOUTMUSIC)*
19 **THE MYSTICAL HOT CHOCOLATE ENDEAVORS** A Clock Without A Craftsman *(MASSACRE)*
20 **MAEBE** Rebirth. Relive. Repeat. *(MAEBE.BANDCAMP.COM)*

DAVE EVERLEY (Reviews Editor)

1 **PUBLIC SERVICE BROADCASTING** This New Noise *(TEST CARD RECORDINGS)*
2 **CROWN LANDS** Fearless *(SPINEFARM)*
3 **TESSERACT** War Of Being *(KSCOPE)*
4 **HAUNT THE WOODS** Ubiquity *(SPINEFARM)*
5 **MYRKUR** Spine *(RELAPSE)*
6 **GREEN LUNG** This Heathen Land *(NUCLEAR BLAST)*
7 **STEVEN WILSON** The Harmony Codex *(VIRGIN/SW RECORDS)*
8 **PETER GABRIEL** i/o *(REAL WORLD)*
9 **REFORMAT** Precursed *(FEARBONE)*
10 **GONG** Unending Ascending *(KSCOPE)*
11 **ENSLAVED** Heimdal *(NUCLEAR BLAST)*
12 **SILVER MOTH** Black Bay *(BELLA UNION)*
13 **RIVERSIDE** ID.Entity *(INSIDEOUTMUSIC)*
14 **THE FIERCE & THE DEAD** News From The Invisible World *(SPENCER PARK MUSIC)*
15 **LARS FREDRIK FRØISLIE** Fire Fortellinger *(KARISMA)*
16 **GOAT** Medicine *(ROCKET RECORDINGS)*
17 **NORTH ATLANTIC OSCILLATION** United Wire *(VINELAND MUSIC)*
18 **COVET** Catharsis *(TRIPLE CROWN)*
19 **BELBURY POLY** *THE PATH (GHOST BOX)*
20 **SERMON** Of Golden Verse *(PROSTHETIC)*

MIKE DANN

ASHLEY DOODKORTE (VOYAGER)

"As a drummer, it's impossible to not be in love with everything Aric Improta does, and his passion, emotive playing and creativity are showcased so beautifully on **Night Verses'** *Every Sound Has a Color In The Valley Of Night: Part 1*. There's nothing better than an instrumental album that makes you feel something; every track has its own colour, its own mood. Lovely stuff."

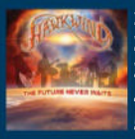
JO KENDALL (Associate Editor)

1 **BIG BIG TRAIN** Ingenious Devices *(ENGLISH ELECTRIC RECORDINGS)*
2 **KING GIZZARD & THE LIZARD WIZARD** PetroDragonic Apocalypse *(KGLW)*
3 **THE FIERCE & THE DEAD** News From The Invisible World *(SPENCER PARK MUSIC))*
4 **GONG** Unending Ascending *(KSCOPE)*
5 **HAWKWIND** The Future Never Waits *(CHERRY RED)*
6 **AMPLIFIER** Hologram *(ROCKOSMOS)*
7 **SILVER MOTH** Black Bay *(BELLA UNION)*
8 **MOTORPSYCHO** Yay! *(DET NORDENFJELDSKE GRAMMOFONSELSKAB)*
9 **TEMPLES** Exotico *(ATO)*
10 **PETER BREWIS** Blowdry Colossus *(DAYLIGHT SAVING RECORDS)*
11 **CROWN LANDS** Fearless *(SPINEFARM)*
12 **GOAT** Medicine *(ROCKET RECORDINGS)*
13 **SEVEN IMPALE** Summit *(KARISMA)*
14 **SOFT MACHINE** Other Doors *(DYAD)*
15 **EMMA TRICCA** Aspirin Sun *(BELLA UNION)*
16 **VIVIAN STANSHALL** Dog Howl In Tune *(MADFISH)*
17 **BLOOD CEREMONY** The Old Ways Remain *(RISE ABOVE)*
18 **NE OBLIVISCARIS** Exul *(SEASON OF MIST)*
19 **THE WITCHING TALE** What Magic Is This? *(BELLISSIMA RECORDS)*
20 **THE HOLY FAMILY** Go Zero *(ROCKET RECORDINGS)*

MIKE BARNES (Writer)

1 **BIG BIG TRAIN** Ingenious Devices *(ENGLISH ELECTRIC RECORDINGS)*
2 **MOTORPSYCHO** Yay! *(DET NORDENFJELDSKE GRAMMOFONSELSKAB)*
3 **GONG** Unending Ascending *(KSCOPE)*
4 **HEDVIG MOLLESTAD WEEJUNS** Weejuns *(RUNE GRAMMOFON)*
5 **SOFT MACHINE** Other Doors *(DYAD)*
6 **EMMA TRICCA** Aspirin Sun *(BELLA UNION)*
7 **HAWKWIND** The Future Never Waits *(CHERRY RED)*
8 **SUSANNA** Baudelaire & Orchestra *(SUSANNA SONATA)*
9 **AMPLIFIER** Hologram *(ROCKOSMOS)*
10 **PHIL MANZANERA & ANDY MACKAY** AM/PM *(BFD)*
11 **NICK FLETCHER** Quadrivium *(ROUGH DRAFT)*
12 **PETER GABRIEL** i/o *(REAL WORLD)*
13 **RETREAT FROM MOSCOW** Dreams, Myths And Machines *(GRAVITY DREAM MUSIC)*
14 **BEATRIX PLAYERS** Living And Alive *(BEATRIXPLAYERS.CO.UK)*
15 **BRIAN ENO** Top Boy (Score) *(BEATINK RECORDS)*
16 **THEY WATCH US FROM THE MOON** Cosmic Chronicles Vol. 1 *(NEW HEAVY SOUNDS)*
17 **HATS OFF GENTLEMEN IT'S ADEQUATE** The Light Of Ancient Mistakes *(GLASS CASTLE RECORDINGS)*
18 **YES** Mirror To The Sky *(INSIDEOUTMUSIC)*
19 **VIVIAN STANSHALL** Dog Howl In Tune *(MADFISH)*
20 **ROGER WATERS** The Dark Side Of The Moon Redux *(COOKING VINYL)*

JEREMY ALLEN (Writer)

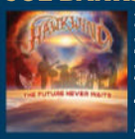


1 **HAWKWIND** The Future Never Waits *(CHERRY RED)*
2 **SPARKS** The Girl Is Crying In Her Latte *(ISLAND)*
3 **HIGH PULP** Days In The Desert *(ANTI-)*
4 **PETER GABRIEL** i/o *(REAL WORLD)*
5 **VIVIAN STANSHALL** Dog Howl In Tune *(MADFISH)*
6 **PENGUIN CAFE** Rain Before Seven *(ERASED TAPES)*
7 **CREEP SHOW** Yawning Abyss *(BELLA UNION)*
8 **ZAHN** Adria *(CRAZYSANE)*
9 **GONG** Unending Ascending *(KSCOPE)*
10 **SILVER MOTH** Black Bay *(BELLA UNION)*
11 **HÖG SJÖ** Hög Sjö *(SMUGGLERS MUSIC)*
12 **SOFT MACHINE** Other Doors *(DYAD)*
13 **THE ORB** Prism *(COOKING VINYL)*
14 **BILL LAURANCE & MICHAEL LEAGUE** Where You Wish You Were *(ACT MUSIC)*
15 **TEMPLES** Exotico *(ATO)*
16 **AIMING FOR ENRIKE** Empty Airports *(JANSEN)*
17 **MOUNDRAG** Hic Sunt Moungrages *(DIONYSIAC)*
18 **BRIAN ENO** Top Boy (Score) *(BEATINK RECORDS)*
19 **JOHN CARPENTER** Anthology II (Movie Themes 1976-1988) *(SACRED BONES)*
20 **PLANK** Future Of The Sea *(GOLDEN LION SOUNDS)*

CHRIS COPE (Writer)

1 **NORTH ATLANTIC OSCILLATION** United Wire *(VINELAND MUSIC)*
2 **AVKRVST** The Approbation *(INSIDEOUTMUSIC)*
3 **LEAGUS** Flora Eallin *(IS IT JAZZ? RECORDS)*
4 **STEVEN WILSON** The Harmony Codex *(VIRGIN/SW RECORDS)*
5 **HAKEN** Fauna *(INSIDEOUTMUSIC)*
6 **THE FIERCE & THE DEAD** News From The Invisible World *(SPENCER PARK MUSIC)*
7 **THE ANCHORET** It All Began With Loneliness *(WILLOWTIP)*
8 **DISTRICT 97** Stay For The Ending *(SPIRIT OF UNICORN MUSIC)*
9 **THE PARALLAX METHOD** Folie Á Trois *(THEPARALLAXMETHOD.BANDCAMP.COM)*
10 **TESSERACT** War Of Being *(KSCOPE)*
11 **THE LEMON TWIGS** Everything Harmony *(CAPTURED TRACKS)*
12 **THE OCEAN** Holocene *(PELAGIC)*
13 **EINAR SOLBERG** 16 *(INSIDEOUTMUSIC)*
14 **THEY WATCH US FROM THE MOON** Cosmic Chronicles Act 1 *(NEW HEAVY SOUNDS)*
15 **EXPLORING BIRDSONG** Dancing In The Face Of Danger *(LONG BRANCH)*
16 **KATATONIA** Sky Void Of Stars *(NAPALM)*
17 **POMEGRANATE TIGER** All Input Is Error *(POMEGRANATETIGER.BANDCAMP.COM)*
18 **DAVID BREWIS** The Soft Struggles *(DAYLIGHT SAVING RECORDS)*
19 **UNKNOWN MORTAL ORCHESTRA** V *(JAGJAGUWAR)*
20 **RIVERSIDE** ID.Entity *(INSIDEOUTMUSIC)*

JOE BANKS (Writer)



1 **HAWKWIND** The Future Never Waits *(CHERRY RED)*
2 **LARGE PLANTS** The Thorn *(GHOST BOX)*
3 **GONG** Unending Ascending *(KSCOPE)*
4 **TEETH OF THE SEA** Hive *(ROCKET RECORDINGS)*
5 **BELBURY POLY** The Path *(GHOST BOX)*
6 **PLANK** Future Of The Sea *(GOLDEN LION SOUNDS)*
7 **LUCIDVOX** That's What Remained *(GLITTERBEAT)*
8 **GOAT** The Gallows Pole O.S.T. *(ROCKET RECORDINGS)*
9 **THE NECKS** Travel *(NORTHERN SPY)*
10 **HEDVIG MOLLESTAD WEEJUNS** Weejuns *(RUNE GRAMMOFON)*
11 **MATT BERRY** Simplicity *(ACID JAZZ)*
12 **HOLY FAMILY** Go Zero *(ROCKET RECORDINGS)*
13 **KAVUS TORABI & RICHARD WILEMAN** Heaven's Sun *(BELIEVERS ROAST)*
14 **SOFT MACHINE** Other Doors *(DYAD)*
15 **ISOBAR** III *(ISOBARPROG.BANDCAMP.COM)*
16 **HAWKLORDS** Space *(HAWKLORDS)*
17 **OZRIC TENTACLES** Lotus Unfolding *(KSCOPE)*
18 **DOMMENGANG** Wished Eye *(THRILL JOCKEY)*
19 **JAMES ELLIS FORD** The Hum *(WARP)*
20 **NORTH ATLANTIC OSCILLATION** United Wire *(VINELAND MUSIC)*

DARYL EASLEA (Writer)

1 **STEVEN WILSON** The Harmony Codex *(VIRGIN/SW RECORDS)*
2 **PETER GABRIEL** i/o *(REAL WORLD)*
3 **ROGER WATERS** The Dark Side Of The Moon Redux *(COOKING VINYL)*
4 **SMOKE FAIRIES** Carried In Sound *(YEAR SEVEN)*
5 **JONATHAN WILSON** Eat The Worm *(BMG)*
6 **PETER HAMMILL** In A Foreign Town/Out Of Water *(ESOTERIC)*
7 **PUBLIC SERVICE BROADCASTING** This New Noise *(TEST CARD RECORDINGS)*
8 **SPARKS** The Girl Is Crying In Her Latte *(ISLAND)*
9 **YES** Mirror To The Sky *(INSIDEOUTMUSIC)*
10 **GONG** Unending Ascending *(KSCOPE)*
11 **ROGER ENO** The Skies, They Shift Like Chords *(DEUTSCHE GRAMMOPHON)*
12 **EDGAR BROUGHTON** Break The Dark *(ESOTERIC)*
13 **PAT METHENY** Dream Box *(BMG)*
14 **SOFT MACHINE** Other Doors *(DYAD)*
15 **JETHRO TULL** RökFlöte *(INSIDEOUTMUSIC)*
16 **HAWKWIND** The Future Never Waits *(CHERRY RED)*
17 **KAVUS TORABI & RICHARD WILEMAN** Heaven's Sun *(BELIEVERS ROAST)*
18 **STRAWBS** The Magic Of It All *(ESOTERIC)*
19 **SIGUR RÓS** Átta *(BMG)*
20 **VIVIAN STANSHALL** Dog Howl In Tune *(MADFISH)*

THE BEST THING I'VE HEARD ALL YEAR...

BRUCE SOORD (THE PINEAPPLE THIEF)

"**The Fierce & The Dead**'s *News From The Invisible World* has dirty bass, fuzz guitars, drums that sound like drums, great melodies and is topped off with a great groove. Forget the modern world of overproduction, infinite layers and hyper-editing. I thought this was a standout, refreshing record that sounded like a band who know each other inside-out."

CARINA HEDLUND

PETTER SANDSTRÖM (MOON SAFARI)

"The year surprised me. **Blur**'s comeback album, *The Ballad Of Darren*, was my favourite and most played of the year. Bands and artists rarely show this much maturity, progression and songcraft this late in their careers, but Blur have done that: Bowie comes to mind and would've been proud of this album."

JUSTIN BORUCKI

FRANK SACRAMONE (EARTHSIDE)

"Concept album *Without Intervention* stands out with **Head With Wings** achieving artistic ambitions in their music and lyrics. The gripping vocal performance of Joshua Corum delivers a wide spectrum of timbre as he sings from the perspective of multiple characters in the album's narrative. It's a refreshing album that reintroduces the sound of bands like Mew into modern progressive music."

THE BEST THING I'VE HEARD ALL YEAR...

OLLY CURTIS

MICHAEL ASTLEY-BROWN (MAEBE)

"2023 saw Ruban Nielson's psych-pop outfit, **Unknown Mortal Orchestra**, produce their most transcendent (and progressive) album yet. *V* is a kaleidoscopic fever dream of woozy, warped-record riffs and simmering funk rhythms, the halcyon haze broken only by Nielson's Hendrixian guitar heroics. Props, too, for being the grooviest record this year to reference Meshuggah."

JACK VENABLES

JIM GREY (CALIGULA'S HORSE)

"Within the first few minutes of *The Sun Would Disappear As I Imagined All The Stars*, **Asymmetric Universe** give you the distinct impression that you're losing the remains of your fragile mind to chaos. But the deeper you go, the more the incredible details and subtleties that make this EP so impactful reveal themselves into a beautifully coherent journey. Keep a close eye on this band, I'm excited for what's to come!"

FRASER WEST

JOHN HELPS (MAYBESHEWILL)

"I've really been into *The Offa Society For Psychical Research*: an absolute belter of an EP from Welsh experimental rockers **Gallops** that simultaneously sounds like it's been delivered from the far future and also discovered on a lost, hopeful but ultimately dystopian 1970s sci-fi film soundtrack."

CHERI FAULKNER (Writer)

1 **UNPROCESSED** ...And Everything In Between *(UNPROCESSED.BAND)*
2 **HAKEN** Fauna *(INSIDEOUTMUSIC)*
3 **SLEEP TOKEN** Take Me Back To Eden *(SPINEFARM)*
4 **EXPLORING BIRDSONG** Dancing In The Face Of Danger *(LONG BRANCH)*
5 **PERIPHERY** Periphery V: Djent Is Not A Genre *(3DOT)*
6 **NE OBLIVISCARIS** Exul *(SEASON OF MIST)*
7 **THE ANCHORET** It All Began With Loneliness *(WILLOWTIP)*
8 **THE OCEAN** Holocene *(PELAGIC)*
9 **EINAR SOLBERG** 16 *(INSIDEOUTMUSIC)*
10 **VOYAGER** Fearless In Love *(SEASON OF MIST)*
11 **GREEN LUNG** This Heathen Land *(NUCLEAR BLAST)*
12 **TESSERACT** War Of Being *(KSCOPE)*
13 **SPURV** Brefjære *(PELAGIC)*
14 **SOEN** Memorial *(SILVER LINING MUSIC)*
15 **KATATONIA** Sky Void Of Stars *(NAPALM)*
16 **MONO** Heaven Vol. 1 *(PELAGIC)*
17 **ENSLAVED** Heimdal *(NUCLEAR BLAST)*
18 **STEVEN WILSON** The Harmony Codex *(VIRGIN/SW RECORDS)*
19 **EARTHSIDE** Let The Truth Speak *(MUSIC THEORIES)*
20 **MYRKUR** Spine *(RELAPSE)*

PAUL GING (Writer)

1 **MOON SAFARI** Himlabacken Vol 2 *(BLOMLJUD)*
2 **YES** Mirror To The Sky *(INSIDEOUTMUSIC)*
3 **TREVOR RABIN** Rio *(INSIDEOUTMUSIC)*
4 **THE FLOWER KINGS** Look At You Now *(INSIDEOUTMUSIC)*
5 **DBA** Celestial Songs *(SPIRIT OF UNICORN MUSIC)*
6 **CROWN LANDS** Fearless *(SPINEFARM)*
7 **KATATONIA** Sky Void Of Stars *(NAPALM)*
8 **HAUNT THE WOODS** Ubiquity *(SPINEFARM)*
9 **NORTH ATLANTIC OSCILLATION** United Wire *(VINELAND MUSIC)*
10 **SIGUR RÓS** Átta *(BMG)*
11 **EXPLORING BIRDSONG** Dancing In The Face Of Danger *(LONG BRANCH)*
12 **PETER GABRIEL** i/o *(REAL WORLD)*
13 **STEVEN WILSON** The Harmony Codex *(VIRGIN/SW RECORDS)*
14 **D'VIRGILIO, MORSE & JENNINGS** Sophomore *(INSIDEOUTMUSIC)*
15 **MYSTERY** Redemption *(UNICORN DIGITAL)*
16 **RAIN** Radio Silence *(GEP)*
17 **KARNATAKA** Requiem For A Dream *(IMMRAMA)*
18 **HAKEN** Fauna *(INSIDEOUTMUSIC)*
19 **IO EARTH** Sanctuary *(IOEARTH.COM)*
20 **L.O.E.** The World And Everything In It *(HOPEFUL TRAGEDY)*

POLLY GLASS (Writer)

1 **STEVEN WILSON** *THE HARMONY CODEX (VIRGIN/SW RECORDS)*
2 **CROWN LANDS** Fearless *(SPINEFARM)*
3 **WYTCH HAZEL** IV: Sacrament *(BAD OMEN)*
4 **BRUCE SOORD** Luminescence *(KSCOPE)*
5 **KING GIZZARD & THE LIZARD WIZARD** PetroDragonic Apocalypse *(KGLW)*
6 **DREAM THE ELECTRIC SLEEP** American Mystic *(DTES.BANDCAMP.COM)*
7 **GREEN LUNG** This Heathen Land *(NUCLEAR BLAST)*
8 **EMPYRE** Relentless *(KSCOPE)*
9 **HAUNT THE WOODS** Ubiquity *(SPINEFARM)*
10 **BIG BIG TRAIN** Ingenious Devices *(ENGLISH ELECTRIC RECORDINGS)*
11 **GLEB KOLYADIN** The Outland *(KSCOPE)*
12 **SLEEP TOKEN** Take Me Back To Eden *(SPINEFARM)*
13 **OUTLANDERS** Outlanders *(EARMUSIC)*
14 **THE FIERCE & THE DEAD** News From The Invisible World *(SPENCER PARK MUSIC)*
15 **MARIUSZ DUDA** AFR AI D *(KSCOPE)*
16 **AMPLIFIER** Hologram *(ROCKOSMOS)*
17 **TESSERACT** War Of Being *(KSCOPE)*
18 **MAEBE** Rebirth. Relive. Repeat. *(MAEBE.BANDCAMP.COM)*
19 **JETHRO TULL** RökFlöte *(INSIDEOUTMUSIC)*
20 **MOTORPSYCHO** Yay! *(DET NORDENFJELDSKE GRAMMOFONSELSKAB)*

GRACE HAYHURST (Writer)

1 **TEMIC TERROR** Management Theory *(SEASON OF MIST)*
2 **THE ANCHORET** It All Began With Loneliness *(WILLOWTIP)*
3 **KATATONIA** Sky Void Of Stars *(NAPALM)*
4 **SCAR SYMMETRY** The Singularity (Phase II – Xenotaph) *(NUCLEAR BLAST)*
5 **PERIPHERY** Periphery V: Djent Is Not Genre *(3DOT)*
6 **TESSERACT** War Of Being *(KSCOPE)*
7 **RIVERSIDE** ID.Entity *(INSIDEOUTMUSIC)*
8 **HAKEN** Fauna *(INSIDEOUTMUSIC)*
9 **KING GIZZARD & THE LIZARD WIZARD** PetroDragonic Apocalypse *(KGLW)*
10 **EXPLORING BIRDSONG** Dancing In The Face Of Danger *(LONG BRANCH)*
11 **KLONE** Meanwhile *(KSCOPE)*
12 **VOYAGER** Fearless In Love *(SEASON OF MIST)*
13 **GONG** Unending Ascending *(KSCOPE)*
14 **ENSLAVED** Heimdal *(NUCLEAR BLAST)*
15 **AVKRVST** The Approbation *(INSIDEOUTMUSIC)*
16 **SLEEP TOKEN** Take Me Back To Eden *(SPINEFARM)*
17 **LAZULI** Onze *(L'ABEILLE RÔDE)*
18 **TREVOR RABIN** Rio *(INSIDEOUTMUSIC)*
19 **EINAR SOLBERG** 16 *(INSIDEOUTMUSIC)*
20 **GREEN LUNG** This Heathen Land *(NUCLEAR BLAST)*

ROB HUGHES (Writer)

1 **SPARKS** The Girl Is Crying In Her Latte *(ISLAND)*
2 **LISA O'NEILL** All Of This Is Chance *(ROUGH TRADE)*
3 **ALTIN GÜN** Aşk *(GLITTERBEAT)*
4 **SILVER MOTH** Black Bay *(BELLA UNION)*
5 **LANKUM** False Lankum *(ROUGH TRADE)*
6 **MOEBIUS** Aspirin *(CURIOUS MUSIC)*
7 **DUTCH UNCLES** True Entertainment *(MEMPHIS INDUSTRIES)*
8 **SIGUR RÓS** Átta *(BMG)*
9 **GOAT** The Gallows Pole OST *(ROCKET RECORDINGS)*
10 **NORTH ATLANTIC OSCILLATION** United Wire *(VINELAND MUSIC)*
11 **GONG** Unending Ascending *(KSCOPE)*
12 **UNKNOWN MORTAL ORCHESTRA** V *(JAGJAGUWAR)*
13 **PENGUIN CAFE** Rain Before Seven *(ERASED TAPES)*
14 **EDGAR BROUGHTON** Break The Dark *(ESOTERIC)*
15 **PHILIP SELWAY** Strange Dance *(BELLA UNION)*
16 **MYRKUR** Spine *(RELAPSE)*
17 **JETHRO TULL** RökFlöte *(INSIDEOUTMUSIC)*
18 **ROSE CITY BAND** Garden Party *(THRILL JOCKEY)*
19 **GOAT** Medicine *(ROCKET RECORDINGS)*
20 **PUBLIC SERVICE BROADCASTING** This New Noise *(TEST CARD RECORDINGS)*

STEPHEN LAMBE (Writer)

1 **SOLSTICE** Light Up *(GEP)*
2 **TREVOR RABIN** Rio *(INSIDEOUTMUSIC)*
3 **YES** Mirror To The Sky *(INSIDEOUTMUSIC)*
4 **DOMINIC SANDERSON** Impermanence *(DOMINICSANDERSON.BANDCAMP.COM)*
5 **RPWL** Crime Scene *(GENTLE ART OF MUSIC)*
6 **EXPLORING BIRDSONG** Dancing In The Face Of Danger *(LONG BRANCH)*
7 **CHRISTINA** Bar Stool Prophet *(TIGERMOTH)*
8 **I AM THE MANIC WHALE** Bumper Book Of Mystery Stories *(IAMTHEMANICWHALE.BANDCAMP.COM)*
9 **SUBSIGNAL** A Poetry Of Rain *(GENTLE ART OF MUSIC)*
10 **THE FIERCE & THE DEAD** News From The Invisible World *(SPENCER PARK MUSIC)*
11 **STEVEN WILSON** The Harmony Codex *(VIRGIN/SW RECORDS)*
12 **RAIN** Radio Silence *(GEP)*
13 **MOON SAFARI** Himlabacken Vol 2 *(BLOMLJUD)*
14 **KARNATAKA** Requiem For A Dream *(IMMRAMA)*
15 **RICK WAKEMAN** A Gallery Of The Imagination *(MADFISH)*
16 **DAMANEK** Making Shore *(GEP)*
17 **LARS FREDRIK FRØISLIE** Fire Fortellinger *(KARISMA)*
18 **ZOPP** Dominion *(FLAT CIRCLE)*
19 **THE EMERALD DAWN** In Time *(WORLD'S END)*
20 **NICK FLETCHER** Quadrivium *(ROUGH DRAFT)*

DOM LAWSON (Writer)

1 **GONG** Unending Descending *(KSCOPE)*
2 **SEVEN IMPALE** Summit *(KARISMA)*
3 **KATATONIA** Sky Void Of Stars *(NAPALM)*
4 **EARTHSIDE** Let The Truth Speak *(MUSIC THEORIES)*
5 **TEETH OF THE SEA** Hive *(ROCKET RECORDINGS)*
6 **THE MYSTICAL HOT CHOCOLATE ENDEAVORS** A Clock Without A Craftsman *(MASSACRE)*
7 **JO QUAIL** Invocation/Supplication *(BY NORSE)*
8 **ENSLAVED** Heimdal *(NUCLEAR BLAST)*
9 **GREEN LUNG** This Heathen Land *(NUCLEAR BLAST)*
10 **TESSERACT** War Of Being *(KSCOPE)*
11 **MOTORPSYCHO** Yay! *(DET NORDENFJELDSKE GRAMMOFONSELSKAB)*
12 **STEVEN WILSON** The Harmony Codex *(VIRGIN/SW RECORDS)*
13 **OZRIC TENTACLES** Lotus Unfolding *(KSCOPE)*
14 **EYELESS OWL** Murmurations *(MOGUL INTERMISSIONS)*
15 **RING VAN MÖBIUS** Commissioned Works Pt II – Six Drops Of Poison *(APOLLON)*
16 **PERIPHERY** Periphery V: Djent Is Not A Genre *(CENTURY MEDIA)*
17 **JORDSJØ** Salighet *(KARISMA)*
18 **EINAR SOLBERG** 16 *(INSIDEOUTMUSIC)*
19 **RANNOCH** Conflagrations *(WILLOWTIP)*
20 **TUSMØRKE** Hestehoven *(KARISMA)*

FRASER LEWRY (Writer)

1 **AVENGED SEVENFOLD** Life Is But A Dream... *(WARNER)*
2 **STEVEN WILSON** The Harmony Codex *(VIRGIN/SW RECORDS)*
3 **CROWN LANDS** Fearless *(SPINEFARM)*
4 **LARS FREDRIK FRØISLIE** Fire Fortellinger *(KARISMA)*
5 **ROGER WATERS** The Dark Side Of The Moon Redux *(COOKING VINYL)*
6 **SLEEP TOKEN** Take Me Back To Eden *(SPINEFARM)*
7 **THE FIERCE & THE DEAD** News From The Invisible World *(SPENCER PARK MUSIC)*
8 **BIG BIG TRAIN** Ingenious Devices *(ENGLISH ELECTRIC RECORDINGS)*
9 **GOAT** Medicine *(ROCKET RECORDINGS)*
10 **TESSERACT** War Of Being *(KSCOPE)*
11 **KING GIZZARD & THE LIZARD WIZARD** PetroDragonic Apocalypse *(KGLW)*
12 **DBA** Celestial Songs *(SPIRIT OF UNICORN MUSIC)*
13 **PUBLIC SERVICE BROADCASTING** This New Noise *(TEST CARD RECORDINGS)*
14 **EXPLOSIONS IN THE SKY** End *(BELLA UNION)*
15 **BLOOD CEREMONY** The Old Ways Remain *(RISE ABOVE)*
16 **AMPLIFIER** Hologram *(ROCKOSMOS)*
17 **HEDVIG MOLLESTAD WEEJUNS** Weejuns *(RUNE GRAMMOFON)*
18 **A FLYING FISH** El Pez Que Voló – Act I *(APOLLON)*
19 **MARIUSZ DUDA** AFR AI D *(KSCOPE)*
20 **MONG TONG** Tao Fire *(GURUGURU BRAIN)*

DAVE LING (Writer)

1 **YES** Mirror To The Sky *(INSIDEOUTMUSIC)*
2 **LALU** The Fish Who Wanted To Be King *(FRONTIERS)*
3 **DBA** Celestial Songs *(SPIRIT OF UNICORN MUSIC)*
4 **RIVERSIDE** ID.Entity *(INSIDEOUTMUSIC)*
5 **MOON SAFARI** Himlabacken Vol 2 *(BLOMLJUD)*
6 **PALLAS** The Messenger *(PALLASOFFICIAL.BANDCAMP.COM)*
7 **TREVOR RABIN** Rio *(INSIDEOUTMUSIC)*
8 **GALAHAD** The Long Goodbye *(AVALON)*
9 **THE ZOMBIES** Different Game *(COOKING VINYL)*
10 **GONG** Unending Ascending *(KSCOPE)*
11 **CROWNLANDS** Fearless *(SPINEFARM)*
12 **JETHRO TULL** RökFlöte *(INSIDEOUTMUSIC)*
13 **RICK WAKEMAN** A Gallery Of The Imagination *(MADFISH)*
14 **HAWKLORDS** Space *(HAWKLORDS)*
15 **HAWKWIND** The Future Never Waits *(CHERRY RED)*
16 **VOIVOD** Morgöth Tales *(CENTURY MEDIA)*
17 **THE DOWLING POOLE** Refuse *(369 MUSIC)*
18 **EMOLECULE** The Architect *(INSIDEOUTMUSIC)*
19 **THE FLOWER KINGS** Look At You Now *(INSIDEOUTMUSIC)*
20 **EDWARD REEKERS** The Liberty Project *(MASCOT)*

GARY MACKENZIE (Writer)

1 **I AM THE MANIC WHALE** Bumper Book Of Mystery Stories *(IAMTHEMANICWHALE.BANDCAMP.COM)*
2 **HAKEN** Fauna *(INSIDEOUTMUSIC)*
3 **DISTRICT 97** Stay For The Ending *(SPIRIT OF UNICORN MUSIC)*
4 **PATTERN-SEEKING ANIMALS** Spooky Action At A Distance *(INSIDEOUTMUSIC)*
5 **RAIN** Radio Silence *(GEP)*
6 **NICK FLETCHER** Quadrivium *(ROUGH DRAFT)*
7 **LAZULI** Onze *(L'ABEILLE RÔDE)*
8 **THE FLOWER KINGS** Look At You Now *(INSIDEOUTMUSIC)*
9 **GODSTICKS** This Is What A Winner Looks Like *(KSCOPE)*
10 **MOON SAFARI** Himlabacken Vol 2 *(BLOMLJUD)*
11 **SOLSTICE** Light Up *(GEP)*
12 **THE FIERCE & THE DEAD** News From The Invisible World *(SPENCER PARK MUSIC)*
13 **THE EMERALD DAWN** In Time *(WORLD'S END)*
14 **PALLAS** The Messenger *(PALLASOFFICIAL.BANDCAMP.COM)*
15 **HATS OFF GENTLEMEN IT'S ADEQUATE** The Light Of Ancient Mistakes *(GLASS CASTLE RECORDINGS)*
16 **M-OPUS** At The Mercy Of Manannán *(M-OPUS.BANDCAMP.COM)*
17 **TESSERACT** War Of Being *(KSCOPE)*
18 **RIVERSIDE** ID.Entity *(INSIDEOUTMUSIC)*
19 **SOUTHERN EMPIRE** Another World *(GEP)*
20 **THE ENIGMA DIVISION** The Enigma Division *(THEENIGMADIVISION.BANDCAMP.COM)*

CHRIS MCGAREL (Writer)

1 **OZRIC TENTACLES** Lotus Unfolding *(KSCOPE)*
2 **THE ENIGMA DIVISION** The Enigma Division *(THEENIGMADIVISION.BANDCAMP.COM)*
3 **THE FIERCE & THE DEAD** News From The Invisible World *(SPENCER PARK MUSIC)*
4 **RIVERSIDE** ID.Entity *(INSIDEOUTMUSIC)*
5 **SEVEN IMPALE** Summit *(KARISMA)*
6 **SUBSIGNAL** A Poetry of Rain *(GENTLE ART OF MUSIC)*
7 **STEVEN WILSON** The Harmony Codex *(VIRGIN/SW RECORDS)*
8 **AMPLIFIER** Hologram *(ROCKOSMOS)*
9 **GONG** Unending Ascending *(KSCOPE)*
10 **ENSLAVED** Heimdal *(NUCLEAR BLAST)*
11 **KATATONIA** Sky Void Of Stars *(NAPALM)*
12 **NE OBLIVISCARIS** Exul *(SEASON OF MIST)*
13 **JETHRO TULL** RökFlöte *(INSIDEOUTMUSIC)*
14 **NORTH ATLANTIC OSCILLATION** United Wire *(VINELAND MUSIC)*
15 **THE OCEAN** Holocene *(PELAGIC)*
16 **VOYAGER** Fearless In Love *(SEASON OF MIST)*
17 **PAT METHENY** Dream Box *(BMG)*
18 **HATS OFF GENTLEMEN IT'S ADEQUATE** The Light Of Ancient Mistakes *(GLASS CASTLE RECORDINGS)*
19 **GREEN LUNG** This Heathen Land *(NUCLEAR BLAST)*
20 **DØDHEIMSGARD** Black Medium Current *(PEACEVILLE)*

JAMES MCNAIR (Writer)

1 **HARP** Albion *(BELLA UNION)*
2 **JONATHAN WILSON** Eat The Worm *(BMG)*
3 **PETER GABRIEL** i/o *(REAL WORLD)*
4 **BRUCE SOORD** Luminescence *(KSCOPE)*
5 **ROGER WATERS** The Dark Side Of The Moon Redux *(COOKING VINYL)*
6 **STEVEN WILSON** The Harmony Codex *(VIRGIN/SW RECORDS)*
7 **PAT METHENY** Dream Box *(BMG)*
8 **UNKNOWN MORTAL ORCHESTRA** V *(JAGJAGUWAR)*
9 **JETHRO TULL** RökFlöte *(INSIDEOUTMUSIC)*
10 **KING GIZZARD & THE LIZARD WIZARD** PetroDragonic Apocalypse *(KGLW)*
11 **STRAWBS** The Magic Of It All *(CHERRY RED)*
12 **YES** Mirror To The Sky *(INSIDEOUTMUSIC)*
13 **EMMA TRICCA** Aspirin Sun *(BELLA UNION)*
14 **SIGUR RÓS** Átta *(BMG)*
15 **VIVIAN STANSHALL** Dog Howl In Tune *(MADFISH)*
16 **TREVOR RABIN** Rio *(INSIDEOUTMUSIC)*
17 **GONG** Unending Ascending *(KSCOPE)*
18 **TIGER MOTH TALES** The Turning Of The World *(WHITE KNIGHT)*
19 **NEAL MORSE** The Dreamer – Joseph: Part One *(FRONTIERS)*
20 **BIG BIG TRAIN** Ingenious Devices *(ENGLISH ELECTRIC RECORDINGS)*

THE BEST THING I'VE HEARD ALL YEAR...

STEVE GULLICK

OLLY BIGNELL (HAUNT THE WOODS)

"**Big Lava** are a small band but the production is massive; *Big Lava* is rocky, retro and super-interesting. The lead guitars are very big and spacey, with lots of retro reverb, and the vocalist has an incredible range. If you're a fan of Haunt The Woods, you'll definitely like this album."

BRIAN PEACHEY

TREE STEWART (THE EMERALD DAWN)

"**Zopp**'s *Dominion* is the best thing I've heard this year. The long, epic tracks on it are reminiscent of the Canterbury scene, particularly the organ work, and it was Caravan's and Soft Machine's long tracks that converted me to prog."

WILL NORBURY

JONNY KNIGHT (EXPLORING BIRDSONG)

"I was looking forward to **The Japanese House**'s *In The End It Always Does* from the first single release, and it did not disappoint. It's beautifully lush, synthy and vocodery pop that embraces you like a warm hug, with amazing instrumentation that is a perfect blend of The Beach Boys, Peter Gabriel and Imogen Heap."

THE BEST THING I'VE HEARD ALL YEAR...

WILL IRELAND

IAN ANDERSON

"**Bruce Soord**'s *Luminescence* brings his more intimate, and even sometimes acoustic sensitivity, to the fore. Personal, introspective and soul-baring, Bruce gets it just right in balancing broad sonic spaces with dense and rich timbres. No histrionics. No dramatics. All in all, a class act and a reminder that restraint can still exercise power, mystery and magic."

NICK ELLIOT

SIMON COLLINS (EMOLECULE)

"Multi-instrumentalist Ben Jones has been working on the **Orion** project for the past 20 years, and it's certainly worth the wait! On *The End Of Suffering* he takes us on a journey of the spirit of evolution, adversity and a brighter tomorrow, with a modern post-grunge production and guitar solos that would make Alex Lifeson proud."

PAUL MACKIE

ALAN REED (PALLAS)

"In my estimation, **Lazuli**'s 10th studio LP, *Onze*, confirms them as the most fun you can have with your clothes on! It contains their trademark wit and intensity, Dominique Leonetti's distinctive vocals and some excellent guitar work from Vincent Barnavol. I can't recommend these guys enough."

MATT MILLS (Writer)

1 **TESSERACT** War Of Being *(KSCOPE)*
2 **ENSLAVED** Heimdal *(NUCLEAR BLAST)*
3 **KATATONIA** Sky Void Of Stars *(NAPALM)*
4 **THE OCEAN** Holocene *(PELAGIC)*
5 **BARONESS** Stone *(ABRAXAN HYMNS)*
6 **GREEN LUNG** This Heathen Land *(NUCLEAR BLAST)*
7 **UNPROCESSED** ...And Everything In Between *(UNPROCESSED.BAND)*
8 **HEROD** Iconoclast *(PELAGIC)*
9 **NE OBLIVISCARIS** Exul *(SEASON OF MIST)*
10 **COVET** Catharsis *(TRIPLE CROWN)*
11 **VOYAGER** Fearless In Love *(SEASON OF MIST)*
12 **PERIPHERY** Periphery V: Djent Is Not A Genre *(3DOT)*
13 **THE HIRSCH EFFEKT** Urian *(LONG BRANCH)*
14 **EINAR SOLBERG** 16 *(INSIDEOUTMUSIC)*
15 **SERMON** Of Golden Verse *(PROSTHETIC)*
16 **OCEAN DISTRICTS** Phantom Islands *(OCEANDISTRICTS.BANDCAMP.COM)*
17 **SOEN** Memorial *(SILVER LINING MUSIC)*
18 **HAKEN** Fauna *(INSIDEOUTMUSIC)*
19 **AVKRVST** The Approbation *(INSIDEOUTMUSIC)*
20 **KLONE** Meanwhile *(KSCOPE)*

CHRIS ROBERTS (Writer)

1 **PETER GABRIEL** i/o *(REAL WORLD)*
2 **STEVEN WILSON** The Harmony Codex *(VIRGIN/SW RECORDS)*
3 **PHIL MANZANERA & ANDY MACKAY** AM/PM *(BFD)*
4 **A CERTAIN RATIO** 1982 *(MUTE)*
5 **SPARKS** The Girl Is Crying In Her Latte *(ISLAND)*
6 **THE CLIENTELE** I Am Not There Anymore *(MERGE)*
7 **HELD BY TREES** Eventide *(SOUND CANYON)*
8 **THE NATIONAL** First Two Pages Of Frankenstein *(4AD)*
9 **BRIAN ENO** Top Boy (Score) *(BEATINK RECORDS)*
10 **PUBLIC SERVICE BROADCASTING** This New Noise *(TEST CARD RECORDINGS)*
11 **CREEP SHOW** Yawning Abyss *(BELLA UNION)*
12 **JOHN FOXX** The Arcades Project *(METAMATIC)*
13 **DUTCH UNCLES** True Entertainment *(MEMPHIS INDUSTRIES)*
14 **LANTERNS ON THE LAKE** Versions Of Us *(BELLA UNION)*
15 **SOFT MACHINE** Other Doors *(DYAD)*
16 **CRIME & THE CITY SOLUTION** The Killer *(MUTE)*
17 **MARIUSZ DUDA** AFR AI D *(KSCOPE)*
18 **ESBEN AND THE WITCH** Hold Sacred *(NOSTROMO)*
19 **GOAT** Medicine *(ROCKET RECORDINGS)*
20 **EXPLOSIONS IN THE SKY** End *(BELLA UNION)*

GRANT MOON (Writer)

1 **STEVEN WILSON** The Harmony Codex *(VIRGIN/SW RECORDS)*
2 **JONATHAN WILSON** Eat The Worm *(BMG)*
3 **THE FIERCE & THE DEAD** News From The Invisible World *(SPENCER PARK MUSIC)*
4 **HAKEN** Fauna *(INSIDEOUTMUSIC)*
5 **BLOOD CEREMONY** The Old Ways Remain *(RISE ABOVE)*
6 **KING GIZZARD & THE LIZARD WIZARD** PetroDragonic Apocalypse *(KGLW)*
7 **BEN REED** Bandaged *(ESOTERIC)*
8 **CROWN LANDS** Fearless *(SPINEFARM)*
9 **GODSTICKS** This Is What A Winner Looks Like *(KSCOPE)*
10 **DISTRICT 97** Stay For The Ending *(SPIRIT OF UNICORN MUSIC)*
11 **YES** Mirror To The Sky *(INSIDEOUTMUSIC)*
12 **JOHN GREENWOOD** Dark Blue *(BOSCO VERDE)*
13 **TRIBE3** Tribe3 *(TRIBE3.NET)*
14 **OZRIC TENTACLES** Lotus Unfolding *(KSCOPE)*
15 **RUBY DAWN** Beyond Tomorrow *(PROGRESSIVE GEARS)*
16 **PERHAPS CONTRAPTION** Nearly Human *(PERHAPSCONTRAPTION.BANDCAMP.COM)*
17 **D'VIRGILIO, MORSE & JENNINGS** Sophomore *(INSIDEOUTMUSIC)*
18 **GLEB KOLYADIN** The Outland *(KSCOPE)*
19 **PLANK** Future Of The Sea *(GOLDEN LION SOUNDS)*
20 **AMPLIFIER** Hologram *(ROCKOSMOS)*

PAUL SEXTON (Writer)

1 **HOLLY HENDERSON** The Walls *(IVY RECORDS)*
2 **SPENCER CULLUM** Spencer Cullum's Coin Collection – 2 *(FULL TIME HOBBY)*
3 **ARBORIST** An Endless Sequence Of Dead Zeros *(KIRKINRIOLA)*
4 **MANZANERA & ANDY MACKAY** AM/PM *(BFD)*
5 **MATT DORSEY** Let Go *(MATTDORSEY1.BANDCAMP.COM)*
6 **LANKUM** False Lankum *(ROUGH TRADE)*
7 **FRUIT BATS** A River Running to Your Heart *(MERGE)*
8 **LICHEN SLOW** Rest Lurks *(ROCK ACTION)*
9 **STEVEN WILSON** The Harmony Codex *(VIRGIN/SW RECORDS)*
10 **NIALL SUMMERTON** What Am I Made Of? *(TINY LIBRARY)*
11 **EMMA TRICCA** Aspirin Sun *(BELLA UNION)*
12 **SIGUR RÓS** Átta *(BMG)*
13 **YES** Mirror To The Sky *(INSIDEOUTMUSIC)*
14 **ROGER WATERS** The Dark Side Of The Moon Redux *(COOKING VINYL)*
15 **TREVOR RABIN** Rio *(INSIDEOUTMUSIC)*
16 **KING GIZZARD & THE LIZARD WIZARD** PetroDragonic Apocalypse *(KGLW)*
17 **JETHRO TULL** RökFlöte *(INSIDEOUTMUSIC)*
18 **PAT METHENY** Dream Box *(BMG)*
19 **L.O.E.** The World & Everything In It *(HOPEFUL TRAGEDY)*
20 **THE EMERALD DAWN** In Time *(WORLD'S END)*

ALISON REIJMAN (Writer)

1 **MYSTERY** Redemption *(UNICORN DIGITAL)*
2 **THE FIERCE & THE DEAD** News From The Invisible World *(SPENCER PARK MUSIC)*
3 **SOLSTICE** Light Up *(GEP)*
4 **STEVEN WILSON** The Harmony Codex *(VIRGIN/SW RECORDS)*
5 **LAZULI** Onze *(L'ABEILLE RÔDE)*
6 **THE FLOWER KINGS** Look At You Now *(INSIDEOUTMUSIC)*
7 **GALAHAD** The Long Goodbye *(AVALON)*
8 **JETHRO TULL** RökFlöte *(INSIDEOUTMUSIC)*
9 **KITE PARADE** Retro *(WHITE KNIGHT)*
10 **THE EMERALD DAWN** In Time *(WORLD'S END)*
11 **I AM THE MANIC WHALE** Bumper Book Of Mystery Stories *(IAMTHEMANICWHALE.BANDCAMP.COM)*
12 **YES** Mirror To The Sky *(INSIDEOUTMUSIC)*
13 **BEATRIX PLAYERS** Living And Alive *(BEATRIXPLAYERS.CO.UK)*
14 **CROWN LANDS** Fearless *(SPINEFARM)*
15 **RIVERSIDE** ID.Entity *(INSIDEOUTMUSIC)*
16 **DAMANEK** Making Shore *(GEP)*
17 **DBA** Celestial Songs *(SPIRIT OF UNICORN MUSIC)*
18 **HEKZ** Terra Nova *(BMH AUDIO)*
19 **EXPLORING BIRDSONG** Dancing In The Face Of Danger *(LONG BRANCH)*
20 **KAVUS TORABI & RICHARD WILEMAN** Heaven's Sun *(BELIEVERS ROAST)*

JOHNNY SHARP (Writer)

1 **RIVERSIDE** ID.Entity *(INSIDEOUTMUSIC)*
2 **GALAHAD** The Long Goodbye *(AVALON)*
3 **STEVEN WILSON** The Harmony Codex *(VIRGIN/SW RECORDS)*
4 **PETER GABRIEL** i/o *(REAL WORLD)*
5 **JETHRO TULL** RökFlöte *(INSIDEOUTMUSIC)*
6 **EINAR SOLBERG** 16 *(INSIDEOUTMUSIC)*
7 **JONATHAN WILSON** Eat The Worm *(BMG)*
8 **DBA** Celestial Songs *(SPIRIT OF UNICORN MUSIC)*
9 **GOAT** The Gallows Pole OST *(ROCKET RECORDINGS)*
10 **IO EARTH** Sanctuary *(IOEARTH.COM)*
11 **TIM ARNOLD** Super Connected *(TA MUSIC)*
12 **KING GIZZARD & THE LIZARD WIZARD** PetroDragonic Apocalypse *(KGLW)*
13 **MARIUSZ DUDA** AFR AI D *(KSCOPE)*
14 **35 TAPES** Fabric Of Time *(APOLLON)*
15 **NORTH ATLANTIC OSCILLATION** United Wire *(VINELAND MUSIC)*
16 **OZRIC TENTACLES** Lotus Unfolding *(KSCOPE)*
17 **SIGUR RÓS** Átta *(BMG)*
18 **PALLAS** The Messenger *(PALLASOFFICIAL.BANDCAMP.COM)*
19 **PLANK** Future Of The Sea *(GOLDEN LION SOUNDS)*
20 **AMPLIFIER** Hologram *(ROCKOSMOS)*

NICK SHILTON (Writer)

1 **MOON SAFARI** Himlabacken Vol 2 *(BLOMLJUD)*
2 **TREVOR RABIN** Rio *(INSIDEOUTMUSIC)*
3 **PETER GABRIEL** i/o *(REAL WORLD)*
4 **RPW** Crime Scene *(GENTLE ART OF MUSIC)*
5 **DBA** Celestial Songs *(SPIRIT OF UNICORN MUSIC)*
6 **THE FLOWER KINGS** Look At You Now *(INSIDEOUTMUSIC)*
7 **RIVERSIDE** ID.Entity *(INSIDEOUTMUSIC)*
8 **STEVEN WILSON** The Harmony Codex *(VIRGIN/SW RECORDS)*
9 **EXPLORING BIRDSONG** Dancing In The Face Of Danger *(LONG BRANCH)*
10 **VOYAGER** Fearless In Love *(SEASON OF MIST)*
11 **GALAHAD** The Long Goodbye *(AVALON)*
12 **PATTERN-SEEKING ANIMALS** Spooky Action At A Distance *(INSIDEOUTMUSIC)*
13 **GLEB KOLYADIN** The Outland *(KSCOPE)*
14 **YES** Mirror To The Sky *(INSIDEOUTMUSIC)*
15 **SOLSTICE** Light Up *(GEP)*
16 **PALLAS** The Messenger *(PALLASOFFICIAL.BANDCAMP.COM)*
17 **MARIUSZ DUDA** AFR AI D *(KSCOPE)*
18 **KARNATAKA** Requiem For A Dream *(IMMRAMA)*
19 **SOUTHERN EMPIRE** Another World *(GEP)*
20 **GLASS HAMMER** Arise *(SOUND RESOURCES)*

DAVID WEST (Writer)

1 **VOYAGER** Fearless In Love *(SEASON OF MIST)*
2 **TREVOR RABIN** Rio *(INSIDEOUTMUSIC)*
3 **THEY WATCH US FROM THE MOON** Cosmic Chronicles Act 1 *(NEW HEAVY SOUNDS)*
4 **GREEN LUNG** This Heathen Land *(NUCLEAR BLAST)*
5 **MYRKUR** Spine *(RELAPSE)*
6 **AMPLIFIER** Hologram *(ROCKOSMOS)*
7 **COVET** Catharsis *(TRIPLE CROWN)*
8 **BLOOD CEREMONY** The Old Ways Remain *(RISE ABOVE)*
9 **ENSLAVED** Heimdal *(NUCLEAR BLAST)*
10 **SOFT MACHINE** Other Doors *(DYAD)*
11 **GLEB KOLYADIN** The Outland *(KSCOPE)*
12 **MYSTERY** Redemption *(UNICORN DIGITAL)*
13 **SPURV** Brefjære *(PELAGIC)*
14 **EMMA TRICCA** Aspirin Sun *(BELLA UNION)*
15 **KATATONIA** Sky Void Of Stars *(NAPALM)*
16 **HAUNT THE WOODS** Ubiquity *(SPINEFARM)*
17 **THE OCEAN** Holocene *(PELAGIC)*
18 **PLANK** Future Of The Sea *(GOLDEN LION SOUNDS)*
19 **INFINITE RISING** Awakening *(INFINITERISING.BANDCAMP.COM)*
20 **THE ANCHORET** It All Began With Loneliness *(WILLOWTIP)*

SID SMITH (Writer)

1 **THE NECKS** Travel *(NORTHERN SPY)*
2 **ZOPP** Dominion *(FLAT CIRCLE)*
3 **HEDVIG MOLLESTAD WEEJUNS** Weejuns *(RUNE GRAMMOFON)*
4 **PAT METHENY** Dream Box *(BMG)*
5 **AKKU QUINTET** Kinema *(MORPHEUS RECORDS)*
6 **GONG** Unending Ascending *(KSCOPE)*
7 **THE FIERCE & THE DEAD** News From The Invisible World *(SPENCER PARK MUSIC)*
8 **ORCHESTRA OF THE UPPER ATMOSPHERE** Theta Six *(DISCUS MUSIC)*
9 **SOFT MACHINE** Other Doors *(DYAD)*
10 **YUMI HARA** Groove Study *(BONOBO'S ARK)*
11 **TU-NER T1** Contact Information *(7TH MEDIA)*
12 **DAS RAD** Veer *(DISCUS MUSIC)*
13 **POIL UEDA** Poil Ueda *(DUR ET DOUX)*
14 **ROGER ENO** The Skies, They Shift Like Chords *(DEUTSCHE GRAMMOPHON)*
15 **SUSANNA** Baudelaire And Orchestra *(SUSANNA SONATA)*
16 **ANCHOR AND BURDEN** Kosmonautik Pilgrimage *(MOONJUNE)*
17 **MAGNUS ÖSTRÖM GROUP** A Room For Travellers *(JAZZLAND RECORDINGS)*
18 **KAVUS TORABI & RICHARD WILEMAN** Heaven's Sun *(BELIEVERS ROAST)*
19 **THE HOLY FAMILY** Go Zero *(ROCKET RECORDINGS)*
20 **DOMINIC MILLER** Vagabond *(ECM)*

CHRIS WHEATLEY (Writer)

1 **DOMMENGANG** Wished Eye *(THRILL JOCKEY)*
2 **HATS OFF GENTLEMEN IT'S ADEQUATE** The Light Of Ancient Mistakes *(GLASS CASTLE)*
3 **AISLES** Beyond Drama *(PRESAGIO)*
4 **HÖG SJÖ** Hög Sjö *(SMUGGLERS MUSIC)*
5 **SKÁLD** Huldufólk *(DECCA)*
6 **FISH ON FRIDAY** 8mm *(ESOTERIC)*
7 **EXPLOSIONS IN THE SKY** End *(BELLA UNION)*
8 **VIVIAN STANSHALL** Dog Howl In Tune *(MADFISH)*
9 **THEY WATCH US FROM THE MOON** Cosmic Chronicles Act 1 *(NEW HEAVY SOUNDS)*
10 **I AM THE MANIC WHALE** Bumper Book Of Mystery Stories *(IAMTHEMANICWHALE.BANDCAMP.COM)*
11 **PAT METHENY** Dream Box *(BMG)*
12 **GONG** Unending Ascending *(KSCOPE)*
13 **OZRIC TENTACLES** Lotus Unfolding *(KSCOPE)*
14 **ISOBAR** III *(ISOBARPROG.BANDCAMP.COM)*
15 **LAUGHING STOCK** Songs For The Future *(APOLLON)*
16 **OIAPOK** OisoLün *(OIAPOK.BANDCAMP.COM)*
17 **GODSTICKS** This Is What A Winner Looks Like *(KSCOPE)*
18 **CARAVELA ESCARLATE** III *(KARISMA)*
19 **HAKEN** Fauna *(INSIDEOUTMUSIC)*
20 **STEVEN WILSON** The Harmony Codex *(VIRGIN/SW RECORDS)*

PHIL WELLER (Writer)

1 **HYPNO5E** Sheol *(PELAGIC)*
2 **EINAR SOLBERG** 16 *(INSIDEOUTMUSIC)*
3 **ABERDEEN** Held Together *(ABERDEEN RECORDS)*
4 **RIVERSIDE** ID.Entity *(INSIDEOUTMUSIC)*
5 **SLEEP TOKEN** Take Me Back To Eden *(SPINEFARM)*
6 **PLINI** Mirage *(PLINI.BANDCAMP.COM)*
7 **HAUNT THE WOODS** Ubiquity *(SPINEFARM)*
8 **TESSERACT** War Of Being *(KSCOPE)*
9 **THE NIGHT VERSES** Every Sound Has A Color In The Valley Of Night: Part 1 *(EQUAL VISION/RUDE)*
10 **PERIPHERY** Periphery V: Djent is Not a Genre *(3DOT)*
11 **CLOSURE IN MOSCOW** Soft Hell *(BIRD'S ROBE)*
12 **SOEN** Memorial *(SILVER LINING MUSIC)*
13 **EXPLORING BIRDSONG** Dancing In The Face Of Danger *(LONG BRANCH)*
14 **STELLAR CIRCUITS** Sight To Sound *(NUCLEAR BLAST)*
15 **VOYAGER** Fearless In Love *(SEASON OF MIST)*
16 **FIXATION** More Subtle Than Death *(INDIE RECORDINGS)*
17 **JAKUB ZYTECKI** Remind Me *(JAKUBZYTECKI.BANDCAMP.COM)*
18 **ARKRVST** The Approbation *(INSIDEOUTMUSIC)*
19 **MAEBE** Rebirth. Relive. Repeat. *(MAEBE.BANDCAMP.COM)*
20 **RAINBURN** Vignettes *(RAINBURN.BANDCAMP.COM)*

RICH WILSON (Writer)

1 **ROGER WATERS** The Dark Side Of The Moon Redux *(COOKING VINYL)*
2 **TREVOR RABIN** Rio *(INSIDEOUTMUSIC)*
3 **YES** Mirror To The Sky *(INSIDEOUTMUSIC)*
4 **STEVEN WILSON** The Harmony Codex *(VIRGIN/SW RECORDS)*
5 **PETER GABRIEL** i/o *(REAL WORLD)*
6 **SOLSTICE** Light Up *(GEP)*
7 **AMPLIFIER** Hologram *(ROCKOSMOS)*
8 **RIVERSIDE** ID.Entity *(INSIDEOUTMUSIC)*
9 **SIGUR RÓS** Átta *(BMG)*
10 **LAZULI** Onze *(L'ABEILLE RÔDE)*
11 **MYSTERY** Redemption *(UNICORN DIGITAL)*
12 **D'VIRGILIO, MORSE & JENNINGS** Sophomore *(INSIDEOUTMUSIC)*
13 **RICK WAKEMAN** A Gallery Of The Imagination *(MADFISH)*
14 **ARJEN LUCASSEN'S SUPERSONIC REVOLUTION** Golden Age Of Music *(MASCOT)*
15 **TESSERACT** War Of Being *(KSCOPE)*
16 **THE FLOWER KINGS** Look At You Now *(INSIDEOUTMUSIC)*
17 **THE FIERCE & THE DEAD** News From The Invisible World *(SPENCER PARK MUSIC)*
18 **BEATRIX PLAYERS** Living And Alive *(BEATRIXPLAYERS.CO.UK)*
19 **GALAHAD** The Long Goodbye *(AVALON)*
20 **GLASS HAMMER** Arise *(SOUND RESOURCES)*

THE BEST THING I'VE HEARD ALL YEAR...

ANDY FORD

JAMES MONTEITH (TESSERACT)

"**Gong**'s *Unending Ascending* is one hell of a psychedelic trip of a record – it's inventive, quirky, retro and yet also fresh. It's as much fun as it is interesting and out-there."

PAUL MOCKFORD

MATT STEVENS (THE FIERCE & THE DEAD)

"**Slowdive**'s *Everything Is Alive* is a beautiful and inspiring album of progressive guitar music. They've added some more synth textures this time, but, as ever, it also made me want to work out how they get those incredibly cool guitar sounds (lots of pedals!). For some genius shoegaze pop, check out *Kisses*."

BOUDICCA RECORDS

ERIN BENNETT (EBB)

"2023 has been a great year for new prog! **Haken**'s *Fauna* has mesmerising instrumentation and supernatural compositions. And **The Emerald Dawn**'s *In Time* took me on an ethereal, symphonic journey."

CALIGULA'S HORSE

Post-pandemic soul-searching replaces djent-adjacent exuberance as Aussie prog metallers deliver grown-up sixth album.

Words: David West **Illustration:** Mark Leary

When Caligula's Horse released *Rise Radiant* in early 2020, the band seemed to be in an ebullient mood with an album about triumph in the face of adversity. Looking back now, it seems almost eerily prescient. Like everyone else, they saw their plans to promote the album crash into the unyielding brick wall of the pandemic. Four years later, *Charcoal Grace* feels like a sombre, reflective counterpoint to *Rise Radiant*, that sense of exuberance exchanged for a melancholy born from the isolation and self-examination of recent times.

The album is informally divided into three acts. The opening tracks showcase the group's contemporary prog metal stylings. There's the drop-tuned riffing of *The World Breathes With Me* and *Golem*. The former exudes anger and sorrow as vocalist Jim Grey pleads, *'God forgive us,'* addressing *'the suicide, the addict, the voyeur, the dead'*. Despite the sense of darkness, the track moves towards a tentative hopefulness, as Grey declares, *'I breathe, and the world breathes with me'* at its conclusion.

The production and arrangements are assertively modern, with Sam Vallen and Dale Prinsse playing extended range guitar and bass respectively. The biggest sonic surprise is how often Grey's voice sits low in the mix. The singer explores a wide dynamic range, from his full voice to a high falsetto and even a breathy whisper in some sections, but the words themselves can struggle to penetrate the density of the music. It's mainly in the heavy sections where the riffing overpowers Grey, which may simply be a product of the fact that extended range instruments fill up a lot of bandwidth and there's not much space available for the singer to inhabit.

The middle of the album, and its centrepiece, is taken up with the four parts of *Charcoal Grace*, about the fractured relationship between a child and their parent. Moving the record away from the djent stylings of the first two tracks, *Prey* layers longer melody lines,

Charcoal Grace

INSIDEOUTMUSIC

> **There's a willingness to express deep, often dark emotions.**

whether carried by Grey's vocal or Sam Vallen's guitar, over the riffing. Musically, it inhabits the same territory as VOLA or Devin Townsend, while the track finds Grey at his most impassioned, singing, *'Without the hate to carry, I could have been somebody.'* From there the band flow into *A World Without*, bringing the tempo down and finding a style somewhere between alternative rock and emo. Vallen has the chance for some expressive soloing in the outro before they switch gears again. *Vigil* is so subdued that it's possible to discern the sound of Vallen's fingers as they slide up and down the fretboard of his acoustic guitar, an effect akin to Ry Cooder's playing on the *Paris, Texas* soundtrack. Lyrically, the band wade out further into the gloom of doubt and regret, with Grey full of anguish as he sings, *'I refuse to heal, I refuse to let go.'*

Give Me Hell, the fourth and final movement of the titular four-part suite, brings the full band back in as the conflict between parent and child reaches a disturbing zenith. Musically, Caligula's Horse sound little like Leprous, yet there's common ground between this album and the Norwegians' *Aphelion* from 2021 in their willingness to explore vulnerability and the long shadows cast by the legacies of trauma or loss. *Give Me Hell* offers no ready resolution for the characters trapped in this dysfunctional relationship, ending with an angry howl of despair: *'I am the hate you gave me/I am only what you made me/Hell is you.'* So much for redemption — the unresolved rage of the song marks the starkest contrast to the hopefulness of *Rise Radiant*.

From the prog metal of the first act, through to the anguish of *Charcoal Grace*, the final three tracks on the album present another change of tone and mood. *Sails*, *The Stormchaser* and *Mute* put the spotlight on bigger hooks, reaching towards Muse-style anthems. They suggest a band of big ambition with songs crafted for arenas, although there's a constant tendency towards verbosity, and the avoidance of standard verse-chorus-repeat structures preclude any possibility for big sing-along moments. What remains constant throughout the album is the sense of yearning, given form in *Mute* when Grey demands to know, *'Who will love me now?'*

Charcoal Grace feels like something of a gamble for Caligula's Horse. There's bravery in their willingness to express deep, often dark emotions. That approach firmly situates the Aussies among the younger generation of prog metal bands, but the subject matter may be confounding for those accustomed to the escapism of more traditionally inclined bands like Dream Theater or Queensrÿche. However, Caligula's Horse sound completely assured of their direction, expanding upon their palette and vision with an admirable confidence and clarity of purpose. Hopefully, they've found some catharsis along the way.

CYAN

Pictures From The Other Side TIGERMOTH RECORDS

Classic and neo-prog meets classy pop-rock in lavish reimagining.

In 2021, Magenta/Cyan mainman Rob Reed revisited the latter's 1993 debut *For King And Country*, and he's done the same here with its 1994 follow-up. Songs have been reworked, rearranged and expanded in a variety of ways and completely re-recorded by a band featuring Reed, the seemingly ubiquitous Peter Jones on vocals and sax, equally in-demand guitarist Luke Machin and ex-Godsticks/Magenta bassist Dan Nelson.

> **Wears its influences on its sleeve, yet still sounds contemporary.**

With elegantly pulsating, yet understated verses and some great vocal hooks, impassioned keyboards and guitar breaks, and the merest hint of early Genesis towards the end, *Broken Man* kicks things off. It's immediately apparent that Jones has approached this project intent on channelling both Peter Gabriel's characterful rasp and Phil Collins' emotive power, which he does very successfully at various points throughout the album, but most notably on this and finale, *Nosferatu*. Almost every track here also features Welsh artist Angharad Brinn's backing vocals (as did *For King And Country*), which work symbiotically with Jones and add a further dimension to the songs.

Jones' sax provides some gorgeous seasoning and soloing to the smooth pop/rock with jazzy undertones of the title track, conjuring the spirit of some slick 80s US TV drama theme tune with a Mike + The Mechanics twist, before the album hits three largely slower, gentler and more atmospheric tunes.

Solitary Angel sees Jones in emotional overload as he demonstrates his extensive vocal range, with some exquisite guitar interludes from Machin. *Follow The Flow* builds from fragile piano and voice, adding intensity with minimal extraneous instrumentation. Both this and *Tomorrow's Here Today* feature further duetting between Brinn and Jones, bringing to mind the Gabriel/Bush pairing on the classic *Don't Give Up*, especially on the latter. *Tomorrow's Here Today* detours into an unexpectedly dramatic, up-tempo instrumental middle section with fiery solos from both Machin and Reed, and a build to a climactic, soaring ending. An undoubted highlight of the album.

Closer *Nosferatu* sees a post-*Lamb* Genesis-esque intro segue into a hard-edged, stomping section reminiscent of the likes of early Pallas. Add in a bit of theatre, more hints of Genesis, the merest suggestion of It Bites and an ending that owes more than a little to *Carmina Burana* and this is an epic 17 minutes of pure prog gold.

Reed has constructed a triumph of melodic prog, which wears its influences on its sleeve, yet still sounds bold and entirely contemporary.

GARY MACKENZIE

ASTRAL MAGIC

Ad Infinitum ASTRAL MAGIC MUSIC

Prolific Finn teams up with ex-Hawkwind singer for motorik adventure.

Santtu Laakso is on a mission to make the world more cosmic. The ex-Dark Sun bassist launched Astral Magic as a solo vehicle in 2020, and since then he's been making King Gizzard & The Lizard Wizard look idle, releasing somewhere in the region of 34 studio albums.

Having previously collaborated with the late Nik Turner, *Ad Infinitum* features another Hawkwind alumni, Bridget Wishart, who sang on 1990's underrated *Space Bandits* and carries plenty of the theatricality she became known for to this. Her voice is unmistakable, though the years have brought a pleasingly Marianne Faithfull-like timbre to her vocals, adding a gravitas to the motor-propelled opener *Shine* and a gothic earthiness to the more electronically-textured *Liquid Light*.

Future Doors is the most beholden to the influence of pop, with Wishart's harmonies lightening things up in contrast to more intense instrumental wig-outs. By contrast, the ambitious title track clocks in at 19 minutes, incorporating slide guitars, key changes and analogue synths that twinkle like extraterrestrial diamonds. It'll be interesting to see what Laakso does next month. **JA**

THE CHRONICLES OF FATHER ROBIN

The Songs And Tales Of Airoea - Book 2 KARISMA

A second serving of blissful, Nordic prog-psych.

An 18-song triple album, released in three parts and due for an eventual release as a lavish vinyl extravaganza, *The Songs And Tales Of Airoea* is a contender for 2023's most unabashedly proggy enterprise. Created by members of Wobbler, Tusmørke and Jordsjø, it began with *Book 1*, a psychedelic prog odyssey that emerged earlier in 2023, sounding uncannily like an unearthed relic from the formative mists of 1971.

Book 2 simply continues on from *Book 1*. An elegant response to its predecessor's lithe, freak-folk denouement *Unicorn*, opener *Over Westwinds* is a soothing oasis of Mellotrons, Moogs and multipart vocal harmonies. *Orias - The Underwater City* morphs from dreamy psychedelia to primitive drum machines and quirky synth melodies.

Thereafter, *The Chronicles Of Father Robin*'s ingenuity comes to the fore. *Ocean Traveller* mixes oddball tempos and gentle angularity and *Lady Of Waves* is a delicate, acoustic waltz with a big rock ending. *Green Refreshments* blends nimble flute rock with warped riffing, and closer *The Grand Reef* is tripped-out Tull transported to moonlit fjords. Can we have *Book 3* now, please? **DL**

THE CURATOR

Living Space CROMERZONE.CO.UK

More unflinching, left-field work from the talented Alistair Murphy.

Through his own output and collaboration with Judy Dyble, Alistair Murphy has proved himself to be a thoughtful, protean talent. His fifth album as The Curator, 2021's *All Lombard Street To A China Orange* was a jazzy, oblique and existential affair, as is his intriguing, rather forlorn sixth.

Featuring No-Man fiddler Steve Bingham and Gryphon's Brian Gulland, *Living Space* is Murphy's lament for "a lost future". The technological promise of the Moon-landing era has, he contends, led to little else than the worst excesses of modern culture. So the rising strings and theremin of opener *Between Worlds* evoke an ominous lift-off into nothingness, its subsequent trumpet and piano lines like a lost transmission from the void. Even the brighter moments – wonky rocker *Farside City Three*, upbeat trip *The Sea Lanes* – are steeped in dislocation and disappointment.

Right up to the grumpy closer *In The Glare (We Fall But We Fly)*, Murphy – with his pleasant, mid-range voice – is the stoic, all-seeing eye of the sad storm. Pushing buttons familiar to Robert Wyatt and Peter Hammill, *Living Space* is an undiluted, left-field record ringing with its maker's truth. **GRM**

COLIN EDWIN & ROBERT JÜRJENDAL

The Weight Of A Shadow HARD WORLD

Second album from UK/Estonian post-ambient team-up.

Colin Edwin has carved an eclectic career in the aftermath of Porcupine Tree's original split via outfits like O.R.k, Burnt Belief and his collaboration with Estonian guitarist Robert Jürjendal on 2020's *Another World*.

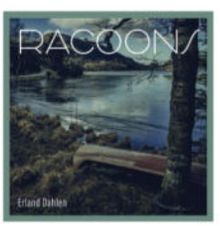
Here, the duo continue their exploration of expansive yet intimate moods smouldering within laid-back grooves. *Time To Find The Sun* stands out as a captivating ballad with Jürjendal's luminous guitar shining over the slow, steady measure of rimshot snare and Edwin's sinuous playing. Though entirely instrumental, several pieces, including the languorous *Back To The Light* and the gently descending form of *Penumbra*, seem to be the backing tracks awaiting a plaintive Tim Bowness-style vocal to bring them into emotional focus.

Jürjendal has always been a thoughtful, ruminative player. Consequently, his soloing over these spacious arrangements lacks any flab or redundancy, always coming directly to the musical point with elegance and economy. Occasionally, his tones evoke a reverb-wreathed Phil Manzanera or ex-King Crimson touch guitarist Trey Gunn's slo-mo smears; each pass is filled with so much yearning. **SS**

ERLAND DAHLEN

Racoons IS IT JAZZ?

Norwegian percussion maestro's fifth solo album.



Though he's best known for a range of work in the Norwegian jazz scene that includes collaborations with trumpeter Nils Petter Molvær and guitarists Eivind Arrest and Stian Westerhus, drummer/composer Erland Dahlen has also released a series of impressive solo albums. His latest finds him at the centre of a complex array of percussive instruments, found objects, rumbling Moog, eerie Mellotron, trap drums and sonorous handbells, the latter very much the signature sound of the record as a whole.

While obviously a gifted player, this is emphatically not a 'drumming record' designed to showcase his walloping chops. Instead, Dahlen embeds his musicality in accessible tunes whose droning chords could, in different contexts, infiltrate themselves into a hybrid electronic pop/rock crossover. It's a soundworld that's as expansive as it is intriguing, as hellish tones, crashing drum accents and ethereal voices swirl around plangent melodies etched by the melancholic tolling of those handbells. Dahlen's broad cinematic canvas and highly charged atmospherics fill the material with an air of mystery and foreboding, building to a controlled series of intense reveals. **SS**

LARGE PLANTS

The Thorn GHOST BOX

Superb sound and songwriting on second album from psych/folk rocker.

Large Plants is the solo project of Wolf People singer and guitarist Jack Sharp. Debuting last year with the biker/psych rock stylings of *The Carrier*, his second album is a pleasing step forward into more nuanced territory while retaining a raw immediacy.

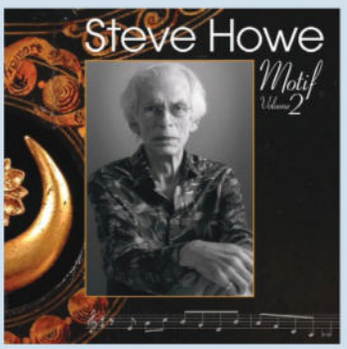
Opening track *Tendril* is a fine illustration of this advance, and its combination of bitingly crisp guitar, roving fuzz bass and misty-eyed vocals is absolute heaven for lovers of 70s-era folk/prog heaviness. Yet this isn't merely an exercise in retro indulgence: like the rest of the perfectly turned songs here, it feels vital and alive. *The Thorn* itself harks back to a long line of bands who've sought to channel the English traditional in a rock format, from Fairport Convention to Wolf People themselves, but Sharp establishes himself as a master of the form here.

Wasted And Tired and *White Horse* are highlights in a similar style, but Sharp reveals a different spin on his sound as the album progresses – *No Time To Make It Right* is a skittering, pulsing hard rocker, and the growling synth of *Every Single Day* like Add N To (X) suddenly pitching up in the middle of *The Wicker Man*. **JB**

STEVE HOWE

Motif Volume 2 HOWESOUND

The Yes man brings solo guitar tunes old and new.



It takes inspiration and real compositional flair to make a solo guitar piece fly, but Steve Howe has done it time and time again. From *The Yes Album*'s live gem *Clap* to *Surface Tension* from his 1979 solo record, *The Steve Howe Album* and beyond, the versatile musician with the sizeable instrument collection frequently come up trumps. Howe revisits both the aforementioned tunes – plus such similarly cherished pieces as *Mood For A Day* and *All's A Chord* – on the home-recorded *Motif Volume 2*. This collection comes 15 years after the conceptually similar *Motif Volume 1*, and once again Howe spreads his bases between deft, Chet Atkins/Merle Travis-style fingerpicking, classical, jazz, bluegrass, folk and more.

> **This is Howe tightrope-walking without a net.**

Though no acoustic version of Frankie Goes To Hollywood's *Welcome To The Pleasuredome* is forthcoming (Howe played session Dobro on the 1984 original at the request of producer/former Yes bandmate Trevor Horn), there's nevertheless loads to enjoy. We get late 50s-style slap-back echo-treated electric guitar nuggets such as *Tailpiece* and *Cactus Boogie* (the original recording of the latter had a more fleshed-out arrangement when it appeared on *The Steve Howe Album*). We also get warming Spanish guitar pieces such as *Oceans Cadenza* and *The Little Galliard*, which is named after a kind of lively triple-time that originated centuries ago.

It's testament to the strength of Howe's writing that, even without the lead vocal and complex full-band arrangement which graced the original version of *All's A Chord*, the piece still stands up. Likewise on *Beginnings*, the title track of Howe's 1975 solo debut, here divested of Patrick Moraz's baroque arrangement for strings, harpsichord and woodwind. On *Motif Volume 2* we see the bare bones of Howe's writing, and those bones are strong.

Beautifully recorded, and modest in its use of guitar effects processing, this is Howe tightrope-walking without a net. Listening to it feels a bit like having him play a solo up close and personal, and who (other than certain former members of Yes, perhaps!) wouldn't want that? It's also an LP likely to make those of a certain age pine for a time when a solo guitar interlude was almost contractual for any prog or rock axe hero worth their Saxa.

As *Motif Volume 2* reminds us, Steve Howe's *Mood For A Day* and *Clap* remain a vital part of a select and ingenious canon that includes Steve Hackett's *Horizons*, Jimmy Page's *Bron-Y-Aur*, and Alex Lifeson's classical intro to *A Farewell To Kings*. Long may he strum.

JAMES MCNAIR

PALLAS

The Messenger PALLASOFFICIAL.BANDCAMP.COM

Neo-prog veterans rekindle their spark with singer Alan Reed.

Pallas have had a stuttering career. Their previous seven albums have come across three short bursts of productivity, separated by prolonged periods of inactivity and line-up changes. However, with singer Alan Reed — who fronted the Aberdeen band between 1986 and 2010 — back in the fold, they have rediscovered their form having suffered something of an identity crisis across their two most recent, Reed-less albums.

Despite minor blemishes it's their best album in decades.

The singer's return is an indicator of the quality of *The Messenger*. Reed said he would never have considered a reunion, even rebuffing an approach a few years ago, but the high standard of the early demos of songs that would appear on *The Messenger* convinced him otherwise, saying that they "sounded like Pallas again". That statement resonates throughout the album's 50-minute playtime. The band have always reflected what they see in the wider world through their music, and here they continue their trend of contemporary commentary topped by a bedrock of uneasy musicality. *Fever Pitch*, a retort to the rich/poor divide of the pandemic and global warming, feels like archetypal Pallas. Often sedated, always dark, the song is sorrowful and minimalist in its composition, leaving acres of space for Reed's musing refrains to take centre stage.

The singer's occasional vocal imperfections, meanwhile, complement the sense of doom that underpins *The Nine*, a song about the human race entering the gates of Hell after a fall from grace. Throughout, the song wrestles with a Jekyll & Hyde tonality, gritty hellfire grandeur dropping down to solemn lows and back again to great effect. At just over four minutes, *The Great Attractor* is their snappiest track. It draws heavily on gnarly King Crimson-esque riffs, a jagged, harmonic-ravaged rhythm preceding saxophone-mimicking lead guitars and villainous jazz motifs.

They leave their lengthiest piece, the 13-minute title track, to last and, unsurprisingly, they throw the kitchen sink at it. Hope-pocked crescendos sweeten jittering time-signature shifts, classical guitar interludes, spacious, emotion-draped solos and Reeds' layered vocals. It's a diverse, ever-evolving song and its fluidity is credit to the seasoned writers behind it. However, there are a handful of flaws to the record. Sadly, the band are without a real drummer which is something of a hindrance. While the programmed drums are inoffensive and have been mapped out with care, they lack the punch and humanity of someone thumping a real kit. Yet, these minor blemishes certainly don't prevent *The Messenger* from being Pallas' best album in decades.

PHIL WELLER

HARKE! EN CO

The Playful Maziness Of Art HARKEJAN.NL

Poe-inspired album guaranteed to make midnight less dreary.

This Dutch group's superb 2021 album *My Treasures* saw them set a collection of Robert Louis Stevenson poems to chamber music, and the follow-up is another idiosyncratic, string-laden selection, with some ambitious, art-rock moments added in.

This time inspiration is derived from the verse of Edgar Allan Poe. The album title comes from his poem, *To The River*, which is given an electric setting with a stunning vocal from Dutch singer-actress Ricky Koole, while Vera van der Poel is operatically convincing on the ravishing and scary *Silence*, and album highlight *A Dream Within A Dream*. Vocally the group's linchpin, composer Harke Jan van der Meulen, hits a sweet spot between Jack Hues and Blue Nile's Paul Buchanan on the groovy, woozy *Evening Star*.

Despite the squalls of avant-garde guitar, the string arrangements remain their forté. *The Valley Of Unrest* and *The Happiest Day* feature the precise playing of cellist Brendan Conroy, violinist Josje ter Haar and guitarist Michiel Nijenhuis, while Lineke Lever's sparse piano is a hallmark of the instrumental *Orbitus*. The whole thing's a delightfully different, high-pedigree listen. **GRM**

SACHA MULLIN

Casino Wilderness Period DOG & PONY RECORDS/DIPTERID RECORDS

Smooth, sophisticated, intelligent art-pop for grown-ups.

Chicago singer-songwriter Sacha Mullin has deployed his distinctive vocal and compositional talents in diverse settings over the years, including collaborations with the bizarre experimental jazz-rock world of Lovely Little Girls and the eclectic prog of Cheer-Accident.

While *Casino Wilderness Period* occasionally dips a toe into such esoteric waters, it leans more towards mature progressive pop with funk and jazz influences, as on the R&B-inflected groove and multilayered harmonies of *Thanks*, and the crafty gradual build of *Arranging Flowers*. Further aspects of his unique song construction can be found in *Neptune In The Snow* with its dreamlike vocals and recurring synth part, and *Fibreglass* which is what might happen if Frost* wrote a jazz-pop song with subtle profusions of female backing vocals.

The way Mullin uses his voice and phrasing is central. It's a mellifluous, beguiling instrument in its own right: it's sometimes soulful, sometimes ethereal, sometimes quasi-operatic, often heavily syncopated, yet almost always engaging. This is carefully fashioned, absorbing, seductive and often curiously profound. **GMM**

ORPHANED LAND

A Heaven You May Create (Live In Tel Aviv) CENTURY MEDIA

Live symphonic delights from the Israeli prog metal outfit.

It's not always easy for bands to enhance their studio work onstage, yet that's exactly what Orphaned Land do during this 30th anniversary concert from 2021. Backed by a 60-piece orchestra and representing tracks from their last four LPs, they've created a gorgeous celebration of their meaningful and unique catalogue.

Mabool, *Birth Of The Three* and *Ocean Land* mix Middle-Eastern prog metal complexity, death metal growls and soulfully clean singing, whereas *The Storm Still Rages Inside*, *The Cave*, *In Propaganda* and especially the bittersweet ballad *Brother* offer softer and more melodic contrasts to those heavier and trickier compositions. Each piece finds the band working triumphantly alongside the orchestra to produce innovative yet authentic versions of the material, with the irresistibly catchy *Sapari* and *All Is One* sounding grander and livelier than ever before.

The seamlessness of the performance combined with some impressively passionate audience participation makes A *Heaven You May Create* feel like a wholly communal and profound experience. **JMB**

PLINI

Mirage PLINI.BANDCAMP.COM

Australian prog guitar hero adds more of the same to his repertoire.

Mirage is the latest studio release from guitarist and songwriter Plini and it marks the first new music from him since 2020's full-length album, *Impulse Voices*.

It features five tracks of intimate, intricate riffs placed boldly among zealous musical formations to incredible effect. *The Red Fox* begins with a peaceful, meandering intro that soon crescendos into an emotive, impactful climax, before settling back into a rhythmic lull. As the synths and strings escalate to an apex, they're joined by distorted, chugging riffs before the echoing comfort of a signature Plini riff accompanies the mix. The distortion returns in tracks like *Still Life* and *Ember* but runs the risk of becoming a comfort blanket for Plini to fall back on.

Yet despite the stellar songwriting and musicianship prevalent on *Mirage*, there's nothing groundbreaking about it. Plini sticks to patterns and note combinations that he's regularly relied on during previous releases, and while *Mirage* is a pleasant listen that could easily be on repeat for a couple of hours, it would be wonderful to see the Australian experimenting more with his sound on future releases. **CF**

TRIBE3

Tribe3 TRIBE3.NET

Highly impressive opening salvo from new Welsh prog trio.

After just a year together, Bridgend trio Tribe3 have secured a slot on 2024's HRH XIV bill and are getting traction on prog radio in Europe and the US, all on the strength of this, their rather impressive self-titled debut.

Packed with melodies, hooks and cut-above musicianship, it owes a debt to Rush, 80s Yes and Marillion, but guitarist Chris Jones' gutsy, sometimes funky guitar often takes the grand symphonic prog into earthier realms. Drummer/vocalist Jon Kinsey can really deliver a song, often in 7/8. The riffy *Calm Before The Storm* shows off his full range, with falsetto moments and choral effects selling the sophisticated melodies.

The Downfall Of The Birdwatcher is a whopping, harmony-freighted anthem, its widescreen musical scale rubbing up charmingly against the twitcher-based lyrics. Composer, bassist and keyboardist Steve Hughes gives all six tracks an intergalactic dimension, from the strings, harps and choirs of 10-minute opener *Invictus* to the keys of dramatic 12-minuter, *Lament*. With those Sabbathy chords of doom down (*Fear Is The Key*) and a sentimental streak (*Dawntreader*) too, Tribe3 are ones to watch for sure. **GRM**

JOSEF VAN WISSEM

The Night Dwells In The Day INCUNABULUM RECORDS

Shadows and shade are embraced with ethereal results.

Such is the wide and varied career of award-winning lute player Jozef Van Wissem – whose CV includes collaborations with film director Jim Jarmusch and actor Tilda Swinton, movie soundtracks and his own solo output – that it can become bewildering as much to the novice as the seasoned observer as to where to jump on or hop off. For all that, the warmth and hypnotic beauty that rests at the heart of this record will appeal to both camps.

Minimalism and repetition are the key elements at play on his latest. *In Exile Here We Wander* sees a seemingly simple motif rising incrementally to build a wall of sound without straying from its foundations. Likewise, *The Call Of The Deathbird* finds Van Wissem joined by sonic manipulator Hilary Woods to fashion a haunting landscape of mortality and wandering spirits.

His is a sonic world that's easy to lose oneself in. Time becomes a meaningless concept to the degree that the shorter material sounds longer than it does and vice versa as Van Wissen wrenches his instrument from the worthy and the dull. *Slowly The Days Of Daylight Fade* evokes Big Star's lachrymose *Holocaust*, but Van Wissen is beguiling throughout. **JM**

DAMIAN WILSON & ADAM WAKEMAN

Can We Leave The Light On Longer? BLACKLAKE RECORDS

Third album of piano-led tunes from Threshold/Ozzy alumni.

Anyone listening to *Can We Leave The Light On Longer?* without prior knowledge of former Threshold/current Arena singer Damian Wilson and his former Headspace colleague and all-round prog man-about-town Adam Wakeman's previous work would be unlikely to detect any great influence from genres outside the mainstream singer-songwriter realm. As with most proggers, though, lofty concepts, long-form musical suites and juddery time signatures are far from the only strings to their bow, and on this third album as a duo, Wilson and Wakeman offer 10 relatively simple, short piano-based compositions that are woven with a common thread of "how we are connected as human beings".

> **Wilson's soulful tenor strikes the most resounding chord.**

The theme informs emotionally resonant, personal vignettes such as the organ-accompanied, lovelorn *Let's Talk* and the slow-building pep talk of *Turn Your Life Around* as well as *November*'s mournfully nostalgic meditation. And although *The Man From The Island*'s tell-don't-show tribute could do with a touch more poetic flair, its string of memories are delivered with enough conviction to hit home.

A more ominous side to the central theme is explored on *AI*, tackling a topic one feels will soon become as ubiquitous in prog as the perils of social media or visions of a dystopian future, but since Wilson and Wakeman are relatively early adopters, they still grab the attention with a tale where the titular technology *'comes alive and no one sees the danger'* before they ask, *'Are we blind?'*

It's the songs led by Wilson's soulful tenor that strike the most resounding chord, such as the album's closing track. When American performers sing of locations in their home country, the places they mention invariably seem somehow imbued with romance, from San José to Memphis to Route 66. British lyricists have largely steered clear of namechecking, say, Portsmouth, King's Lynn or Weston-super-Mare in song. So hats off to the duo for bravely naming one of the most affecting ballads on this record after a leafy commuter town in Surrey. *Addlestone* succeeds in transcending any mundane associations, though, as Wilson evokes scenes of *'Riding bareback in the evening sun/Through the meadows and the meads we'd run.'*

Unashamedly sentimental stuff, of course, and thoughts of the nearby M25 might taint some listeners' investment in it, but it's delivered, like everything Wilson and Wakeman do, with a conviction that is hard to deny. Shine on, fellas.

JOHNNY SHARP

CAMEL

Air Born: The MCA & Decca Years 1973-1984 UNIVERSAL

Enormous 27-CD/five-Blu-ray set honours band's glory years.

Camel, unsung heroes of prog, went many years without the nutrition of publicity, but more recently there's been a moderate shift back towards acknowledging their stature. This gargantuan box set, consisting of 32 discs, reassembles all the albums (remastered) from their heyday, plus previously unreleased out-takes and new mixes of three mid-70s concerts. Further live and TV footage leads the Blu-ray content. *Air Born* is an immersive experience, and

> **They are masters of tasteful rock; emotive and plangent.**

after these gently insistent sounds have stroked the ears awhile, anything which doesn't have a lovely Andy Latimer guitar solo elevating it feels somehow unsatisfactory.

Camel's self-titled 1973 debut was a range-finder, but then *Mirage*, produced by David Hitchcock, was a calm, considered blend of sweetness and stretching the boundaries, notably on the lengthy *Lady Fantasy*. From here, Camel patented a palatable fusion of Floyd's dreamier float fests, Genesis' early celibate swooning and the of-its-time rock wrought by Wishbone Ash or Barclay James Harvest. *Music Inspired By The Snow Goose* was an orchestral tangent with David Bedford, which perhaps confused floating voters, but 1976's *Moonmadness* (which includes this set's title track and the tender psychedelia of *Lunar Sea*) remains arguably their best record, with glancing attempts at pop which don't cloy. *Rain Dances* saw the 'classic line-up' dissolved, and though the addition of refugees from Caravan made sense, there's a mild drop-off in quality thereafter. *Breathless*, from 1978, wheezes. The 80s saw a needed tweak as *Nude* (about the marooned Japanese soldier who didn't know World War Two had ended) and *Stationary Traveller* (concerning East German refugees and the Berlin Wall) lean in to concepts, always ensuring there's a heart-tugging Latimer solo brewing to wow young fans like Steve Rothery or Steven Wilson.

Camel die-hards will get the hump if we don't discuss the lesser-sighted contents here. It's hard to think what more could have been done to justify the adjectives 'comprehensive' and 'definitive'. From almost every album session there are demos, singles, Radio 1 shows. A 1974 Marquee gig captures the winning spirit of their breakthrough, while 1975 sets from the Royal Albert Hall and the BBC find them starting to get more earnest. 1977 shows from Golders Green Hippodrome and Hammersmith Odeon represent their strengths as masters of a tasteful form of rock; emotive and plangent. Later work is even more considered, with perhaps 1984's live double *Pressure Points* encapsulating their zephyr-like appeal best. Camels, like this band's music, are deceptively strong and durable.

CHRIS ROBERTS

10CC

20 Years: 1972-1992 DEMON

Multitasking Stockport quartet's serially over-egged-of-their-time omelettes.

Populating a phone's music library with 10cc essentials is easy. Their run of mid-70s hits were bona fide, pop-literate, soft-prog gold. But as this exhaustive 145-track, 14-disc, all the albums, plus single edits, B-sides and alternatives box set reveals, warming to their deeper cuts is a far tougher task.

As far as 70s bands go, they're as unsalvageable as a budgie jacket, but as is often the case with repertoires of similar vintage, their signature hits are rose-tinted with lashings of seductive nostalgia. Unsurprising, as this is exactly the purpose for which they were designed; *Donna*, *Rubber Bullets* and *The Dean And I* hark back to an idealised 50s America in the form of sock-hop doo-wop, *Jailhouse Rock* retread and prom-smooch-to-midlife-breakdown soap opera, respectively.

10cc songs weren't so much written as contrived; constructed by four multi-tasking musos in thrall to *Sgt Pepper*-era Beatles, who could all comfortably and confidently sing lead, write and produce. So, while a shared Tin Pan Alley sensibility held sway, complexity, busyness and an overarching air of too-many-cooks battling to make their mark on every single song renders much of their output self-defeatingly hard to hum. But staying with The Beatles, Kasenetz-Katz bubblegum vets Graham Gouldman, Eric Stewart, Lol Creme and Kevin Godley are all McCartneys. They can conjure up cleverly worded, commercially targeted heartstring-strumming couplets all day long (*I'm Not In Love*, *I'm Mandy, Fly Me*), but lack the gritty Lennon passion necessary to truly rock their roll. They're also always trying to be funny, and often by using uncomfortable, very 70s stereotypes; *20 Years* is a virtual travelogue of unwisely-deployed accents and route one lyrical puns (*Life Is A Minestrone*, *Dreadlock Holiday*).

Things simplified after Godley and Creme disembarked in '76, but Stewart and Gouldman never quite managed to capture the infuriating, imperfect magic of the preposterously ambitious original four-piece. **IF**

ARABS IN ASPIC

Reissues KARISMA

A trio of treats from Norway's retro kings.

Certified masters of retro prog, Arabs In Aspic have sustained their artful, lysergic fever dream for the last 26 years, and few bands have such a strong and consistent catalogue of albums. Following on from the first batch of vinyl reissues covering the band's earliest studio escapades, this latest triumvirate revisits the three albums the Norwegians released between 2013 and 2017.

All three are absolutely bursting with mischief and dazzling colour. Originally released in 2013, *Pictures In A Dream* is the most instantly accessible of the three. Comprising 10 succinct and uproarious songs, several of which clock in at under three minutes in length, it veers from the liquid, soul rock hallucination of the title track to the Steely Dan-like grooves and proto-metal thunder of *Difference In Time* and surging, psilocybin rock odyssey of closer *Vi Møtes Sikkert Igjen*. For those who have never had the pleasure, it remains the ideal entry point into the Arabs' sepia-tinted sonic cosmos.

Confirming that even intrinsically nostalgic bands can still stride boldly forward, 2015's *Victim Of Your Father's Agony* is a more sophisticated, conceptual affair. Cramming an absurd number of ideas into a laudable economical 40 minutes, the Trondheim quintet are at their sharpest on the through-the-looking-glass Sabbath-isms of *One* and the slow-motion freak-out of *Flight Of The Halibut*, while the closing title track is one of the band's greatest epics, and a feast of on-the-money Purple/Heep indulgence.

2017's *Syndenes Magi (The Magic Of Sin)* is the best of the lot. Comprising three sprawling epics, the band's sixth full-length was a great leap forward that reeked of authenticity and supreme compositional confidence. It takes great skill and plenty of audacity to pen something as expansive and experimental as the 20-minute *Down In Darkness Part 2*, but Arabs In Aspic had evolved beyond their nostalgic roots and were hurtling towards legendary status. Magic is about right. **DL**

KEVIN AYERS

Joy Of A Toy ESOTERIC

Remastered vinyl edition of psychedelic classic offers more than madcap laughs.

While many claim Kevin Ayers' influence was great, the list of artists who actually sound like him is shorter than his attention span was. A stop-start career, in which he was often more interested in reclining intoxicated on a sunny beach than grafting at the musical craft, nonetheless delivered multiple fascinating moments, and his solo debut, now reissued in its original format, remains a gorgeous and beguiling maverick masterpiece.

After leaving Soft Machine, he mulled over packing it all in. Jimi Hendrix gave him a guitar and, reanimated, he delivered the songs that became *Joy Of A Toy* to the fledgling Harvest label, who spent generously on its production. Musicians included Soft Machine friends Robert Wyatt, Mike Ratledge and Hugh Hopper, with David Bedford arranging and an on-the-way-up Paul Buckmaster playing cello. Syd Barrett visited the sessions, though the track on which he (badly) played guitar didn't feature until a 2003 reissue. (This release sticks religiously to the 1969 template with its baroque gatefold and all.)

From the impish bizarreness of the opening track to the twisted, semi-parodic, alt-folk of *All This Crazy Gift Of Time*, *Joy Of A Toy* is a unique, sometimes unsettling experience. Is it half-arsed and throw-away, or is the subversive genius torching the rulebook? The question, unanswerable, only bolsters the aura. Even without Ayers' voice, the music would be a box of tantalising tricks. With it, it conjures alchemy. His baritone, both languid and dominant, gives the songs a shade of unorthodoxy which goes beyond typical English hippie eccentricity.

Girl On A Swing has developed the best-known afterlife, and marries charm and oddness like early Floyd playing early Bee Gees. The instruments subtly shiver and tremble. *Stop This Train*, forever slowing down and speeding up, deconstructs blues rock nonchalantly, while *The Lady Rachel* is the missing link between The Velvet Underground and Brian Protheroe. This is an album of divergent grace. **CR**

BAKER GURVITZ ARMY

Neon Nights: The Broadcasts 1975 ESOTERIC

Tasty package from Ginger Baker's mid-70s collab.

Just because a band burn it up in concert, it doesn't automatically mean they'll recreate that onstage charisma once inside a studio. That certainly applies to Ginger Baker's mid-70s collaboration with the Gurvitz brothers, guitarist Adrian and bassist Paul. While failing to secure a place in rock's first division, the Baker Gurvitz Army nevertheless produced an agreeable blend of honest, decent rock that stretched the format a little with a swirl of ambitious instrumental flash.

Released in 1975, their second album *Elysian Encounter* knocked the spots off their same-year debut, *The Baker Gurvitz Army*, due to improved writing and the arrival of vocalist Snips, previously frontman with Sharks, and one-time Canterbury scene keyboardist Pete Lemer – whose textural swathes simultaneously add conceptual glue to the music and create broader space for Adrian Gurvitz's soloing. This quintet owns the stage in an excellent package that includes three audio shows and two DVDs containing an *Old Grey Whistle Test* appearance and a full live show first aired on German TV's *Musikladen*.

The problem sometimes with being a 'legend' is that pleasing the crowd doesn't necessarily always mean serving the music. Literally and figuratively, Ginger Baker stamps, thumps and whacks his personality into these numbers. When making stage announcements he sounds a bit confused and well-lubricated, much to the evident, if a little strained, amusement of his bandmates.

Still, there's no quibbling with their ability to deliver a soulful kick on *Remember*, with Adrian's sudden accelerations on the guitar at the fore. It's sometimes reminiscent of the nimble force fellow journeymen Patto imbued in their music through Ollie Halsall's idiosyncratic writing and spirited playing. And like Patto, though well-liked and critically respected in their day, the breakthrough for Baker Gurvitz Army didn't happen. A great package for old campaigners and new recruits alike. **SS**

JETHRO TULL

War Child II PARLOPHONE

Outtakes and oddities get the Wilson glow-up treatment.

Arriving almost two years later than originally scheduled, *War Child II* is something of an odd one in Tull's extensive catalogue. The 11 tracks date from the same 1973-1974 sessions that produced the *War Child* album itself and feature the classic Tull line-up that included Barriemore Barlow on drums, John Evan on keys and bassist Jeffrey Hammond alongside Ian Anderson and Martin Barre. All the music here has been released previously, whether on compilations (*Nightcap* and *M.U. — The Best Of Jethro Tull*), on the *War Child* 40th-anniversary edition, or the 1976 EP *Ring Out, Solstice Bells*.

> **Wilson's remixes fully articulate every last detail in the material.**

Everything here has been remixed by the ubiquitous Steven Wilson, but the selling point for *War Child II* is that this release marks the first time this music has been available on vinyl (excepting the two entries from the *Ring Out...* EP, although the Wilson remixes make their vinyl debut). The music is a mixture of fully developed songs and tracks that feel more like unfinished sketches, although even the latter benefit from Wilson's expert ear.

What the album lacks, though, is anything that leaps out at the listener as something that could have been a single. Even the strongest songs on *War Child II* feel like mid-album cuts, and *Paradise Steakhouse* is a good example. Barlow's drumming is typically inventive and expressive, the arrangement throws out some intriguing twists and turns, but the melody is of middling appeal rather than distinctly memorable. *Saturation* follows in the same vein; *Sealion II* is a minor bit of silliness that almost makes The Who's memorably daft *Boris The Spider* seem profound. *Quartet* is a playful tune that skips between folk and baroque moods, all of it elevated by the string arrangement and Evan's excellent work on harpsichord and organ.

The song *War Child II* is an alternate arrangement and performance of the title track from the original 1974 album, while *Tomorrow Was Today* and *Glory Row* are among the stronger tracks in terms of the writing and melodies. *March, The Mad Scientist*, one of the two tracks from *Ring Out, Solstice Bells*, is an acoustic folk tune that's so brief it feels like an unfinished demo, but *Pan Dance*, from the same EP, is a lovely orchestral piece as bright as sunlight glistening on freshly fallen snow, ending the listening experience on a high note. Although there's nothing as compelling as *Bungle In The Jungle* or *Skating Away...* the 1974 line-up of Tull were such strong players that they seem incapable of ever being less than engaging, and Wilson's remixes fully articulate every last detail in the material.

DAVID WEST

NO-MAN

House Keeping: The OLI Years /Swagger

ONE LITTLE INDEPENDENT/BURNING SHED

Consummate collection of Wilson and Bowness' youthful yearnings.

Now that both Steven Wilson and Tim Bowness have adoring audiences, it's hard to explain why No-Man seemed so out-of-step as the 90s began. Although the industry and press were generally more open to innovators and misfits during that era, they never quite found a home. Rave reviews couldn't keep their label investing indefinitely, but the benefit of hindsight allows us to hear the young No-Man's foresight. It would become de rigeur to blend art-rock with dance grooves, or fashion romantic confessionals which veiled the angst amid panoramic soundscapes.

> **Their precocious stew of literacy, funk and jazz still disarms.**

The five-CD box set *Housekeeping* compiles 1992's mini-album *Lovesighs — An Entertainment* and the following year's full debut proper, *Loveblows And Lovecries — A Confession*, plus 1994's *Flowermouth*, a singles disc and a radio sessions set. It's clear throughout that the music they admired and aspired to was transcendent of topicality and trends: Japan, Talk Talk and Kate Bush were references. By sticking to their guns they got their just rewards, but it took a hiatus, industrious solo/separate endeavours and the small matter of a decade or three for that recognition to filter through.

Lovesighs shows that they pursued an ethos of 'go big or go home' from the off. Their first majestic home run, *Days In The Trees*, gilded by Ben Coleman's violin, appears in both '*Mahler*' and '*Reich*' versions (can't imagine why mainstream journalists deemed them pretentious). A cover of Donovan's *Colours* did trip-hop before it was a thing, and overall their precocious stew of literacy, funk and jazz still disarms.

Loveblows... saw Wilson and Bowness living the dream with Japan graduates Mick Karn, Richard Barbieri and Steve Jansen joining them. *Sweetheart Raw*, especially, dazzles with danceable dynamics and aesthetic agility. *Flowermouth* saw Robert Fripp and Lisa Gerrard joining in and is usually cited as their *Citizen Kane* — although its grandeur, in pursuit of beauty, sometimes barrels into plump opulence. And the added sessions, while hardly rough, offer less earnest counterbalance.

Also revamped and extended is their 1989 (then cassette-only) release *Swagger*, pre-record-deal recordings which reveal a candid, less studied, longer-haired outfit. Bowness uses what he's called his "before" voice, emoting passionately in Bono mode, prior to patenting his understated sighing trademark. Wilson, even here, displays musical range which borders on the uncanny. They find their feet with bookish name-drops like *Life Is Elsewhere*, and the hammering electro-pulse of *Swirl*. The unguarded feel encourages Coleman's solos to take centre-stage. No-Man were an elegant secluded island bound to be discovered one day.

CHRIS ROBERTS

BE-BOP DELUXE

Hot Valves ESOTERIC

Newly-remastered 10-inch vinyl edition of their classic EP.

Cherry-picking one song from each of their first four LPs, Be-Bop Deluxe first released *Hot Valves* in October 1976 on Harvest Records. The label described *Maid In Heaven*, *Bring Back The Spark*, *Blazing Apostles* and *Jet Silver And The Dolls Of Venus* as songs which had "emerged as Be-Bop standards" during the 400 or so live shows the band had played in the preceding years, and all four tunes have certainly stood the test of time. If you want a perfect snapshot of frontman Bill Nelson's stylish, glam-influenced art-rock, here it is.

Economical prog pop doesn't get any sparkier than *Maid In Heaven*, a song that crams more taut hooks into two minutes and 26 seconds than seems humanly possible. Nelson wrote it about his unhappy first marriage and an affair he was having with Jan Monks, later his second wife, and the sister of Be-Bop Deluxe's guitar tech Stuart Monks. *'It's not easy to live this way/Just an hour and a fleeting kiss 'til the morning,'* he sings, describing his life at that time. Elsewhere, *Sunburst Finish*'s *Blazing Apostles* critiques the profiteering of the US Christian evangelists that Nelson had encountered when Be-Bop toured the US, and his searing guitar leads come on like a stinging retort.

Be-Bop were at their most glam-influenced circa their 1974 debut *Axe Victim*, and that's audible on the wonderfully assured sounding *Jet Silver And The Dolls Of Venus*, even if the song's fairly complex arrangement stretches out into something we now immediately recognise as prog. Once again, Nelson's choice guitar work demonstrates why he was once head-hunted by Sparks, and his solo at the top of the song sounds like the sonic prequel to Francis Dunnery of It Bites' lead work on *Still Too Young To Remember*.

Whip-smart, dazzlingly creative and ultimately hugely influential: the Be-Bop Deluxe encapsulated on *Hot Valves* had it all. Remember them this way. **JMN**

CARAVAN

If I Could Do It All Over Again I'd Do It All Over You/ Cunning Stunts DECCA/UMC

Canterbury classics get the 180g vinyl treatment.

While 1971's *In The Land Of Grey And Pink* hogs a considerable portion of the spotlight in Caravan's story, these new reissues remind us of the importance of 1970's *If I Could Do It All Over Again I'd Do It All Over You*, establishing the groundwork crucial to their future growth and development as a band. Not only does Jimmy Hastings' deft flute and sax become more integral on this album, but the band's jazz-rock DNA also comes more clearly into focus. Along with the bucolic air represented by the cover and the whimsy of the title track, and *Hello Hello*'s nursery rhyme conundrums, the hard-edge palindromic riffing and increased instrumental muscularity of side two's epic and ambitious *For Richard* suite posits a more confident template for what Caravan would do next.

1975's *Cunning Stunts* catches the band on their sixth studio album. While there's some quintessential Caravan in the shape of Pye Hastings' orchestrally embroidered *Stuck In A Hole*, there's also evidence of a push towards more obviously commercially orientated AOR stylings in the shape of new bassist Mike Wedgwood's Lennon-esque *Lover* and the funk-rock of *Welcome The Day*. Both sound slightly at odds when compared to the rest of the material. The trademark side-long composition is still present via *The Dabsong Conshirtoe*, a patchwork quilt of soaring themes and discursive songs imbued with knowing self-deprecating humour.

While die-hard collectors will always insist that an original first pressing is always best, such items, though highly desirable, aren't exactly wallet-friendly. That's certainly the case when it comes to Caravan's second album. A 1970 copy in good condition will set prospective buyers back an eye-watering amount. Although the latest 180g editions might not hold the cache of such a sought-after rarity, the advantage of these great-sounding reissues is they bring such hard-to-find items within the fans' eager grasp. **SS**

FAMILY

Bandstand ESOTERIC

A reminder of a band owed more dues.

Released in 1972, Family's sixth and penultimate album arguably remains the best entry point for neophytes. Leaving behind the twisting psychedelia and complexities of their earlier incarnations, the more straightforward and riff-based approach to songwriting contained within these grooves reaped plenty of dividends, as well as a Top 20 hit with rocking album opener *Burlesque*.

For all that, many of Family's hallmarks remain firmly in place, be it Roger Chapman's raspy vocals (the pop smarts of *Coronation* are a particular joy that crystallise the time and the place of the album's release), John 'Charlie' Whitney's dexterous playing on the barroom blues of *Glove* and the disorientating sense of weirdness that propels *Bolero Babe*. Quite how the pastoral positivity of *My Friend The Sun* failed to crack the singles charts is another of those anomalies that make for endless debate among obsessives, but brawling rocker *Broken Nose* – replete with a squelchy synth break by John 'Poli' Palmer and backing vocals by Linda Lewis – finds them in more characteristic form.

In addition to the original album, this remastered version is bolstered by the addition of a handful of unreleased versions and a radio session. The original take of *Coronation* reveals a more restrained vocal approach, while an early attempt at *My Friend The Sun* is evocative of a hoedown.

A Radio 1 session for Bob Harris from October 1972 – their 23rd in six years for the BBC – is dependably muscular, and shows off yet another Family line-up. By this point, bassist and backing vocalist John Wetton had left to join King Crimson, while Palmer worked with Linda Lewis on her solo albums *Lark* (1972) and *Fathoms Deep*. Replaced by Jim Cregan and Tony Ashton respectively and limbering up for Family's final album, *It's Only A Movie* the following year, *Burlesque*, *Ready To Go* and *Dark Eyes* go in particularly hard. A fine collection for fans and newbies alike. **JM**

STEVE HACKETT

To Watch The Storms/Wild Orchids INSIDEOUTMUSIC

Hackett albums from 2003 and 2006 get first-ever vinyl release.

As Steve Hackett's live visitations of classic Genesis material and ongoing solo re-release schedule attest, he's a diligent curator of his past. These two LPs from the early-to-mid-00s find him in playful mode, even if they rarely peak as high as solo-career masterpieces *Please Don't Touch!* and *Spectral Mornings*.

Recorded with his then-touring band (including Hackett himself on vocals), 2003's *To Watch The Storms* includes *Wind, Sand & Stars*, a classy deep-cut with ambient and flamenco flavours. *Strutton Ground* is gorgeous too: a vocal-harmony-rich song that name-checks ELO. Less effective, though, is straight-ahead blues instrumental *Fire Island*, which seems incongruous and overly safe alongside material such as *Frozen Statues*, a song whose opening soundscape conjures Kate Bush circa *Hounds Of Love*.

Released in 2006, Hackett's 18th studio album *Wild Orchids* is similarly diverse. With its slowed-down, heavily-treated voices, *Transylvania Express* is conceivably a nod to Jimi Hendrix's *...And The Gods Made Love*, while there's a haunting, Simon & Garfunkel-like feel to the reverb-heavy melodies and chiming steel-string arpeggios of *Set Your Compass*. Elsewhere, *Waters Of The Wild* is an ethnic percussion-loop and sitar-sound-propelled setting of WB Yeats' poem *The Stolen Child*. It's a decent, if slightly dated-sounding affair, but The Waterboys' setting of the same Yeats poem on their 1988 album *Fisherman's Blues* remains the definitive musical nod.

All the same, Hackett's 'ambient swampland' cover of Bob Dylan's *Man In The Long Black Coat* impresses, and *Wild Orchids*' nylon-string guitar instrumental *Until The Last Butterfly* is deftly beautiful. Both these albums' covers feature typically striking artwork by Hackett's second wife, the Brazilian painter Kim Poor. She'd been his go-to illustrator since 1975's *Voyage Of The Acolyte*, but the couple would divorce before Hackett released his next solo album, 2008's *Tribute*. **JMN**

PINK FLOYD

Atom Heart Mother (Special Edition) PINK FLOYD RECORDS

Desirable two-disc Japanese package gets worldwide release.

On its release in October 1970, *Atom Heart Mother* became Pink Floyd's first UK No.1 album. It was a strong indication of their growing mainstream popularity, but the band would later regard it — and particularly its side-long orchestral rock title track — as a failed experiment. Yet at the time, they obviously had more faith in it, with a group version of the *Atom Heart Mother* suite becoming a mainstay of their live set for a couple of years.

> **For hardcore fans perhaps, but a fascinating artefact.**

And it's footage of one such performance that provides the inspiration for this latest special edition.

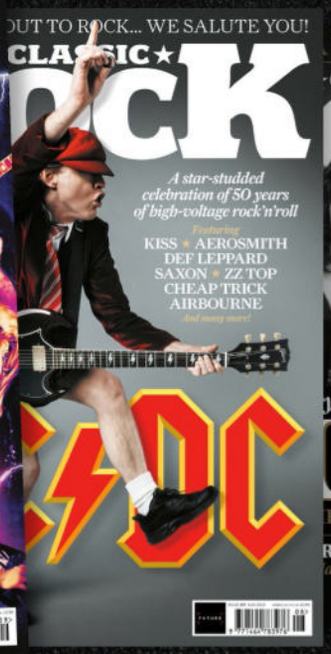
In August 1971, Floyd travelled to Japan for the first time to headline the Hakone Aphrodite Festival, the country's first international outdoor rock event. Their appearance was filmed, and footage of them playing *Atom Heart Mother* first featured on *The Early Years 1965-1972* box set in 2016. Sometime after this, the original 16mm film master was discovered in a fan's garage, and subsequently restored to a much higher quality. This led, in 2021, to a special edition of *Atom Heart Mother*, initially only released in Japan — now it's being made available worldwide, and it's quite an item. Not only does it include a Blu-ray of the restored footage (plus a shorter film of the band's crew setting up their gear in the mud and rain), but also a plethora of related memorabilia, including reproductions of the festival programme, flyer and ticket, and a live poster. Neatly packaged as a seven-inch square, it also includes a booklet of previously unseen photos from their visit.

The concert footage is wonderfully evocative, and is interspersed with shots of the band arriving at the airport, doing a press conference, taking the bullet train etc. However, while the 16-minute film is soundtracked by the band's (excellent) version of *Atom Heart Mother* from the show, the shots are taken from throughout their set, which means that images and music are rarely in sync. Still, it works fine, and when the mist starts rolling in from the nearby lake, the spotlit stage against a backdrop of wooded hills, it's all rather *Apocalypse Now*.

As for the album itself, the 2011 remaster is used, though the CD bag with a poly inner is a nice touch. Listening again, *Atom Heart Mother* itself sounds much more cogent than the band gave it credit for — in fact, this is arguably peak progressive Floyd. Rick Wright's *Summer '68* is a great deep cut, and even *Alan's Psychedelic Breakfast* has an oddly meditative charm.

A release for hardcore fans only perhaps, but a fascinating artefact, nonetheless.

JOE BANKS



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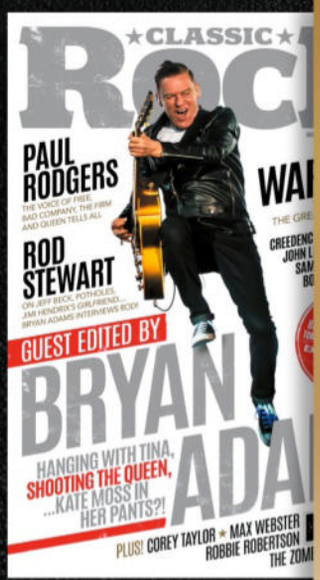

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HEAD CONTROL SYSTEM

Murder Nature KSCOPE

Long-forgotten artefact from Ulver's Kristoffer Rygg gets another day in the sun.

Despite Head Control System being a vehicle for two progressive metal luminaries, they slipped down the back of the sofa of history. Starting life as a project named SinDRomE by future Anathema drummer and keyboardist Daniel Cardoso, it blossomed when Ulver vocalist Kristoffer 'Garm' Rygg got involved. Belying the duo's pedigree, their only album was released with little fanfare and no live support into the post-nu metal hinterland of the mid-2000s, where it lay as a largely undiscovered gem.

Now *Murder Nature* has been disinterred and put back on display with a disc's worth of bonus material that sheds new light on the original release. It sounds of its time, with a touch of Tool, a dash of Queens Of The Stone Age and a polished alt-rock sheen that would have been radio-friendly if airplay had come within hailing distance.

There's still a lot to admire, though, in both Rygg's exemplary vocals – and the lack of them. The Norwegian singer's diverse range and penchant for layering tracks of his own voice to create an amazing one-man choir has a natural tendency to become a focal point of the projects he's involved in, and Head Control System were certainly no exception. This reissue includes instrumental versions of most of the tracks and, without Rygg's attention-hogging performance, Cardoso's contributions (i.e. everything else) really get the chance to shine. There was always a lot going on under the hood of this album but the varied dynamics, little flourishes and complete attention to detail impress more than ever in this format.

Elsewhere, there's a reversed version of *Kill Me*, which was backwards on the original and now sounds even more sinister, with Rygg repeatedly crooning *'Kill me'* over a laid-back piano vibe. There's also a cover of Seal's *Kiss From A Rose*, some instrumentals, several work-in-progress demos and, of course, the original album in all its glory. *Murder Nature* is certainly worthy of a second look, or a first for anyone it passed by originally. **PT**

PENTANGLE

Reunions - Live & BBC Sessions 1982-2011 CHERRY RED

The classic line-up recreate familiar magic on a four-CD box.

Big-name bands may get back together on a roughly bi-weekly basis now, but it was not always thus. When the original line-up of UK folk linchpins Pentangle reunited for a string of performances in 1982 after nine years apart, it was quite the event.

That restored line-up was short-lived though, and despite the quintet's perennial voice Jacqui McShee continuing to front various incarnations of the band to this day, much excitement also greeted the reunion of the founding five (McShee plus guitar virtuosos Bert Jansch and John Renbourn, plus Danny Thompson on double bass and drummer Terry Cox) in 2008, which lasted until Jansch's death three years later.

This box set focuses on performances from those anticipated gatherings, and it shows how the fundamental musicianly skills that first bewitched in the early 1970s didn't fade in the slightest with the subsequent decades.

In fact, years of professionalism and improved technology seem to have improved their renditions of live favourites, such as the traditional murder ballad *Bruton Town* and the jazzy, Miles Davis-influenced lilt of *I've Got A Feeling*.

Even if the sound quality is on the dusty side on a disc of recordings from their 1982 Italian tour, Jansch and Renbourn's rich finger-picking tapestries and McShee's yearning vocal pierce the soul just as surely on *If A Had A Lover* as they do again, in higher fidelity, on a sparkling BBC TV performance from the same year.

The inclusion here on discs 3 and 4 of the original line-up's 2008 live album *Finale: An Evening With Pentangle* may reduce the appeal of the package for those who already own that album, but on its own merits, it shows the by-now-pensionable Pentanglers on sublime form, with even the complex time signatures of *Light Flight* failing to hinder its spritely groove.

So if the original Pentangle burned relatively briefly, this collection shows just how brightly, even after the flame was rekindled. **JS**

OPETH

Damnation MUSIC FOR NATIONS

Swedes' first full-prog outing gets a 20th-anniversary vinyl reissue.

On its release in 2003, *Damnation* was a hugely important release for Opeth. While the Swedish outfit were already renowned for threading deep progressive elements through their death metal foundation, that hulking metallic presence was a defining and ever-present feature. On *Damnation* and preceding sister-piece *Deliverance*, they separated their dualistic tendencies. Originally envisaged as a double album and recorded across the same tortuous session, *Deliverance* drew the aggression while *Damnation* explored a softer, richer side of the band's musical personality. That side might now be wholly familiar to Opeth fans, but back in 2003 it was revelatory.

> **There's an emotional depth and layers of diversity in sound.**

Both albums have already been revisited by producer, musical collaborator and Porcupine Tree founder Steven Wilson, who remixed and remastered them in 2015. Now to mark 20 years since the original's release, that overhauled version of *Damnation* is getting a dedicated release on limited edition opaque, transparent and picture disc vinyl.

According to Opeth mainman Mikael Åkerfeldt, *Damnation* is the one record out of the band's entire catalogue best suited for vinyl treatment, due to the fact that it's "not really cluttered with stuff". He certainly has a point. It's by no means a simplistic piece of work; there's an emotional depth and layers of diversity in sound and meaning but these are not achieved by throwing in the compositional kitchen sink. *Hope Leaves* is a straightforward piece of fragile balladeering for example, while the instrumental *Ending Credits* — a track that Åkerfeldt has previously said he ripped off from Camel — rides a slick, six-string lament.

Elsewhere things are a little more involved without ever losing sight of the song at their heart. There's more than a hint of Porcupine Tree to opener *Windowpane*, on which Wilson provides the rich Mellotron counterpoints to the bluesy guitar. *Closure* builds from Led Zep-esque 12-string folk to an electrified jam, while *To Rid The Disease* adopts an almost post-rock dynamic with its jarring transitions from rich acoustic guitar to sharper piano interludes.

Opeth went into the studio with the grand idea of the dichotomous double album — which was vetoed by their label, while Åkerfeldt was plagued by writer's block, and the frontman's grandmother passed away towards the end of the recording. It's no wonder the lyrics are maudlin, but despite the difficulty of its creation, there's a creative energy that buzzes through the album. Even without its contextual importance for Opeth, *Damnation* stands up as a damned fine piece of work and one that's still worthy of celebration.

PAUL TRAVERS

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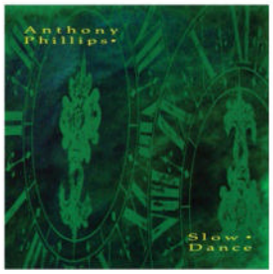
ANTHONY PHILLIPS

Slow Dance ESOTERIC

Ex-Genesis guitarist's suite is more Elgar and Sibelius than Banks and Rutherford.



After leaving Genesis in 1970, Anthony Phillips didn't quite know what he would do next. He spent time extending his musical training, learning new instruments, working as a music teacher and embarked on writing what would become a substantial collection of diverse material.

Phillips embarked on *Slow Dance* properly in 1989, when things weren't looking too rosy for his solo career and life was made all the more difficult when he discovered, after he was well into recording and already financially and personally committed, that he had lost his record contract. He envisaged it as an ambitious instrumental composition that distilled much of what he'd learnt and had been influenced by. With pressure being applied to produce more commercial, pop-orientated solo material, and having branched out into producing library music and pitches for TV and film soundtrack work, he felt it was the right time for something that better reflected who he was as a composer.

The music itself, here split into two parts reflecting the sides of a vinyl LP, is a series of themes, motifs and aural sketches, with the second part being fractionally more lively and immediate. Moving from pastorally inclined neo-classicism with piano or Phillips' signature 12-string guitar to stately synth-brass and string passages, it mostly progresses as slowly and often languidly as its title suggests. Anyone looking for big Genesis moments will be largely disappointed – although there is a slightly more strident passage about three-quarters of the way through the second part of *Slow Dance*, the easiest points of reference would more readily be the likes of instrumental Camel and a lighter The Enid. Phillips invested in new technology and new keyboards at the time and his toying with sounds and drum machines can be detected throughout. Although not immediately impactful nor particularly experimental, it becomes strangely immersive and mesmerising on careful repeated listens. **GMM**

STEELEYE SPAN

The Green Man Collection PARK RECORDS

Folk rock pioneers' recent-career celebration.

A crucial part of the second generation of the British electric folk revolution, Steeleye Span's longevity and present-day vitality remain a thing of wonder. Though their last release, 2019's *Est'd 1969*, was their 24th studio album and showed a band in the most robust of health, it's often their earlier catalogue that tends to get the most accolades, and given the groundbreaking nature of the folk-rock movement of that period, it's entirely understandable. However, it's also unfortunate as it implies their best is long behind them. *The Green Man Collection* rights that particular wrong by delving into some of their more recent output.

What Steeleye Span have always done exceedingly well is put the human voice in a setting where it positively shines. The massed call that opens *Harvest* is a perfect example of their resonant vocal power. Burnished with radiant harmonies, they cut through the air like a scythe. When the group sings, *'And we'll roar out, roar out, roar out our harvest home,'* it's not too fanciful to hear in that cathartic release an aching if momentary connection between today's cramped urban modernity and ancient open fields.

And if Steeleye Span are about anything it's the song. *Old Matron* tears along with some added instrumental fire from Ian Anderson's speedy flute, renewing a longstanding acquaintance with the Spanners that goes back to the Jethro Tull man's role as producer on 1974's *Now We Are Six*, while Maddy Prior's telling vocal on the wistful *January Man* has an understated but insistent power to it.

While this collection acts as a good introduction for newcomers, long-term fans will be tempted by extras including a knockabout reworking of *Hard Times* featuring an old pal, Status Quo's Francis Rossi; a stripped-down cover of Elvis Costello's always poignant *Ship Building*; and the title track, a 1983 Bob Johnson number that's burdened by a harsh 1980s production but sounds vastly superior in its 2023 remake. **SS**

JOHN WETTON

An Extraordinary Life SPIRIT OF UNICORN MUSIC

Comprehensive eight-disc overview of late prog icon's solo career.

What sounds particularly fresh among the many delights in this collection of John Wetton's six solo albums, plus two discs of unreleased material, is 1980's *Caught In The Crossfire*. His solo debut, it lays the groundwork for the sound he'd begin co-creating with Asia a year later, but the energy of the then-current new wave era also seems evident in the likes of *Turn On The Radio*, creating an ebullient power pop/prog hybrid. Another standout is the similarly energetic but more obviously proggy *When Will You Realize?* from the same album, which gyrates unpredictably while Tull man Martin Barre reels off expressive lead lines.

> **He was every bit as effective when he was playing the loner.**

Possessing a superb voice, Wetton sometimes prioritised emotional power over a technically perfect take. This is apparent on the raw testimony of the title track from 1997's *Arkangel*. Beginning with a Hammer Horror thunderclap, the song quickly crosses movie genres into Bond theme territory, with Wetton pursuing the spiralling orchestration ever upward, while hometown buddy and former Crimson colleague Robert Fripp contributes spine-tingling guitar. It's a genuine career highlight, against stiff competition.

Wetton's final solo album before his death at the age of 67, 2011's *Raised In Captivity*, is arguably his strongest. Asia had long since been ticking over nicely again by this point, so Wetton used this project to indulge his more authentically progressive impulses. Highlights include *The Devil And The Opera House*, an intriguing Faustian tale haunted by that most diabolically associated of instruments, the violin, courtesy of Roxy Music/UK man Eddie Jobson. *Goodbye Elsinore* is an acoustic-based shanty with a touch of *Watcher In The Skies* in the lead guitar, which is appropriate since it's Steve Hackett providing it. *Mighty Rivers* bursts forth with a massed choir of voices before Wetton and co-writer Anneke van Giersbergen entwine their vocals over orchestral backing in a real End Titles-style finale.

The two CDs of unreleased material contain many fully-realised songs, a few alternative versions (such as a much more guitar-heavy take on the 2008 *Icon* track *Sex, Power & Money*) and some sketchier demos. Among the strongest unfamiliar songs are *Straight From The Heart* and *I'd Give It All To You*, typically forceful power ballads that could easily have sounded at home on the initial brace of Asia albums.

'Many's the time I played the loner,' he dolefully considers on the reflective *Maryanne*. He was certainly a team player, as his superb collaborative track record in bands shows. But this beautifully curated set is a timely reminder that he was every bit as effective when he was indeed playing the loner.

PAUL GING

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GEDDY LEE

My Effin' Life HARPER

Rush's self-professed "Mr Bossypants" gets upfront and personal.

While their music reached millions, Rush themselves were a black box for much of their career. Whether it was down to disinterest or contempt, interviews went little further than the fact they were kind of nerdy and Neil Peart knew who Ayn Rand was. That changed with 2010's revelatory *Beyond The Lighted Stage* documentary, which dug deep into their history and friendship like never before.

Geddy Lee's hugely readable autobiography goes even deeper. He's funny and candid about everything from the struggle of the band's early days (he was unceremoniously fired by original drummer John Rutsey in 1969) to drugs (hash, acid and cocaine: the latter an attempt to cope with their manic late 70s touring schedule).

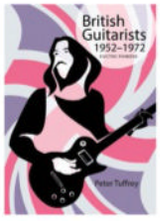
But there's a sadness to it, too. Lee – born Gershon Eliezer Weinrib – has spoken many times about being the child of Holocaust survivors, but seeing it in black and white is reminder of just how much it shaped the life of his family. The death of Neil Peart – lovingly referred to as 'Pratt' throughout – is even more affecting. Lee's recollections are concise but moving, the sense of loss tangible.

Rush were once perceived as aloof. *My Effin' Life* puts that misconception to bed once and for all. **DEV**

PETER TUFFREY

British Guitarists 1952 - 1972 Electric Pioneers GREAT NORTHERN BOOKS

Gear-centric guide to classic six-string heroes.



Having worked in the guitar industry, Peter Tuffrey brings a tech's eye to his subject. *British Guitarists* looks at the careers and equipment of 39 players, covering prog stars like Martin Barre, Robert Fripp and Steve Howe, bluesmen including Eric Clapton and Paul Kossoff, and heavy rockers such as Tony Iommi and Jimmy Page.

Tuffrey provides plenty of detail about the instruments, amps and pedals employed by each artist, blended with overviews of their backgrounds, formative experiences and recordings. He draws upon archive interviews and his own chats with his subjects, where available, to add some colour – however, the prose can be dry and prone to bland generalisations. David Gilmour is "widely regarded" and Steve Howe "has created a legacy of music…", broad statements that could be applied equally to any of the artists covered herein, while there's little insight into each player's musical identity and individual style.

Countering that, the book is beautifully presented on high quality paper and is generously illustrated with photos throughout. Tuffrey knows his guitars and details like how Gilmour tuned his pedal steel on *Breathe* should satisfy any curious gearheads. **DW**

THE ZOMBIES

The Zombies: Hung Up On A Dream UTOPIA DISTRIBUTION

Colin Blunstone and co get the documentary they deserve.

Two hours fly by in director Robert Schwartzman's heartwarming and highly entertaining documentary about the music-mad teenagers from St Albans and their extraordinary rise: scoring a US No.1 single with 1964's *She's Not There*, before crash-landing back to earth after the usual outrageous rip-off record biz practice.

A clear, engaging narrative by all remaining members brings the viewer close the action and emotion around certain situations. For *Prog* readers there is much on their second record, the outstanding, late-blooming prog-psych work *Odessey And Oracle*, as well as what the bandmembers did next, such Rod and Chris' heavying-up with Argent, and Colin Blunstone's solo career, which takes some unexpected and amusing turns. The most touching moment is reflecting on their guitarist, Paul Atkinson, who became a major player in the music industry, discovering ABBA, Joan Armatrading and many others.

Taking the band up to their *Odessey*-related 'revival' and subsequent 2019 induction at the Rock And Roll Hall Of Fame, *Hung Up On A Dream* doesn't just round things off, it signals a new era of appreciation, as well as the continuing tremendous bond between the friends. **JK**

PORCUPINE TREE

Closure/Continuation Live MUSIC FOR NATIONS

Reformed prog icons' triumphant return, captured in Amsterdam.

"It's very nice to see that in the 12-year absence the audience has expanded somewhat, which is wonderful," Porcupine Tree's Steven Wilson says, surveying the audience at Amsterdam's Ziggo Dome arena. "Maybe we should disappear for another 12 years."

Does absence make the heart grow fonder? *Closure/Continuation Live* suggests the answer is an emphatic 'Yes!' This DVD and Blu-ray captures the band in the midst of their high-demand 2022 reunion tour, which saw them showcase their comeback album of the same name surrounded by a generous dose of Porcupine Tree's celebrated back catalogue.

> **Wilson has emerged from the hiatus a more confident performer.**

Flanked by old hands Gavin Harrison and Richard Barbieri, and newbie live recruits Randy McStine on guitar and bassist Nate Navarro, PT open with 2002 belter *Blackest Eyes*, with its juxtaposition of crunching riffs and melody a fitting aperitif for what's to come. The newer material doesn't sound out of place, with the knotty bass line of *Harridan*, the bounce of *Rats Return* and the transcendency of *Dignity* all highlights. Elsewhere the labyrinthine, 17-minute *Anesthetize* remains a white-knuckle favourite, while *Sleep Together* lunges towards an exhilarating climax. And as with any Wilson production, the audio is pin-point sharp.

Visually, the quintet stand in front of a huge video backdrop, and the grade-A lighting and swooping camera work adds to the sense of occasion. It seems that the frontman has emerged from the band's hiatus a more confident performer. Perhaps it's his experience of chart battles with pop acts like Ed Sheeran, or collaborating with Elton John, but the audience connection feels greater and he's swaggering around, waving his bandmates into action.

Wilson might get the limelight, but the rest are just as eye, and ear, catching. Harrison, lording over the arena as usual on his high-perched drum riser, reels off a masterclass in dexterity, while Barbieri with his keyboard textures cements his status as Porcupine Tree's most underrated component. McStine, meanwhile, is a useful addition with some assured playing and flighted backing vocals, and Navarro cuts through with a tone as rich as mama's tomato sauce.

Things come to a finale with *Halo* and the stick-on *Trains*; during a break in the latter, Wilson stops to gaze out at the thousands of bodies in front of him, soaking in the clap-happy adulation from an audience who have been waiting over a decade for this very moment. While other concerts in this vast arena may come with pyro or confetti, Porcupine Tree let the music do the talking. Let's just not leave it another 12 years, okay?

CHRIS COPE

Take a bow

MARILLION

VENUE	THE ROUNDHOUSE, LONDON
DATE	26/11/2023

It's starting to look a lot like Christmas... if your annual festive shindig means sheets of freezing rain framed against a grey London sky and the dark silhouettes of the city's skyline, with a soundtrack scored by Marillion. There's something very reassuring about hearing *Easter* out of season and realising time is creeping to the end of yet another year.

Tell that, though, to the hundreds of poor souls caught out in the torrent as the patient and seemingly endless sold-out queue of punters – heads down, hoods up – shuffle along to the sanctuary of London's landmark venue. The Roundhouse – as featured on the artwork for Genesis' *The Lamb Lies Down On Broadway* (how apt, how prog!), has, much like Marillion, reinvented itself many times over. Railway shed, a home for heads and then driven into the ground by the local dignitaries to the point where the local council tried to flatten it, before being reinvented for a new age.

And though it feels like a natural venue for Marillion – an art space with commercial aspirations – it's a brand-new home for the band. Steve 'H' Hogarth, droll, possibly with a drink or two inside him, had, by his own admission, never even set foot inside the venue before. Ditto Pete Trewavas.

"It looks," says H, squinting up at the high domed ceiling, "like somebody bombed the Albert Hall, then rebuilt it very quickly."

"The ringing notes of *Sugar Mice* undoes those who've managed to keep it together so far - rheumy eyes, holding their pints a little too tightly."

He's on very good form, as are the band. Their sterling light show – washes of colours, beautiful banks of lasers cutting through the man-made smog – sits perfectly in a room without corners. The ceiling is lit up in dashes of light, the walls bounce the dense spectrum of colours around. The aforementioned *Easter* becomes a giant splash of green as the crowd sing themselves hoarse, and it's only the second song in the set.

Even better still is *Beyond You*: sparse, delicate, it's a song The Blue Nile or Talk Talk might have tried their hand at, if either band had stayed together. It's illuminated by pin-pricks of blue light bouncing off a large mirror ball hanging from the ceiling, and it's no mistake that a round room suits a globe of refracting glass. Its simplicity is an extension of the understated nature of the song, but the effect is quietly astounding.

Mike and Mike – whom the band had bumped into at their hotel the night before – have flown in from New York for the show and it's that kind of adulation and dogged admiration (and a slew of very strong albums) that have kept Marillion buoyed all these years. Not that H is letting their audience off lightly.

"You have to clap all the way through this next song – tricky at your age." Before conceding: "Okay, my age."

He's not wrong, though: *Map Of The World*'s looping rhythm has foxed most of the crowd before the second verse, even if the sing-along is word-perfect to the end.

Marillion aren't a band to rest on their laurels, as proven with the sterling 2022 release *An Hour Before It's Dark* – inflammatory, outraged, present. The gnarly, hard-edged and somehow looser take on *Reprogram The Gene* they perform tonight sounds like their best version of the song so far. *Care*, too, has grown into something magnificent, bigger than the band themselves. The fourth movement of the song – *Angels On Earth* – brings the pandemic crashing back into the room, the sacrifices of the health services, the indelible scar left on the Earth. It reduces the man next to *Prog* to tears, and he isn't the only one.

It's a high bar, but with a catalogue of songs decades deep, the tenor of the evening remains intact, the shifting *Splintering Heart* giving way to the lilting *Neverland*, still full of yearning, caught on the hooks of regret. The ringing notes of *Sugar Mice* undoes those who've managed to keep it together so far – rheumy eyes, holding their pints a little too tightly, thoughts suddenly somewhere very far away – and then *King*, H's paean to the sometimes damning downside of fame, sees us out into the night. Lightheaded, awed and then the rain sets in again, hard.

PHILIP WILDING

ANNE-MARIE FORKER

Steve Rothery having a divine moment.

The Roundhouse, a building seemingly made for mirrorballs.

Steve Hogarth prowls before his audience.

Pete Trewavas makes himself at home.

Definitely better than being out in the rain.

It's an Easter parade! Well, sort of.

Mark Kelly looks on as Steve wibbles away.

I AM THE MANIC WHALE

VENUE	THE CAMDEN CLUB, LONDON
DATE	06/11/2023
SUPPORT	TOM SLATTER

Looking relaxed and disarmingly presenting like an ordinary singer-songwriter armed with an acoustic guitar, **Tom Slatter** embarks on a set that embraces darkness, fantastical events, weird characters, wry humour and twisted poignancy. Bookended by the sinister gloom and jarring jauntiness of *Some Of The Creatures Have Broken The Locks On The Door Of Lab 558* and the thought-provoking portrait of homelessness and everyday magic that is *Wizards Of This Town*, he throws out gorgeously fragile love songs set during the apocalypse. There's also the 20-minute, multipart *The Miser's Tale*, which describes (via mysterious metal claws, a brain in a jar and a giant skeleton pulled out of the Thames) how an old man manages to be not quite as dead as his relatives think he is. Merely hinting at his extensive and extraordinary back catalogue, Slatter is warmly received.

I Am The Manic Whale have built an impressive collection of songs that veer musically towards Genesis, Big Big Train, Spock's Beard and It Bites, while crafting something that's peculiarly British and entirely their own. The set for this mini-tour is refreshed from gigs earlier in the year with additions from the terrific latest album, *Bumper Book Of Mystery Stories*. Indeed, they come onstage to a surreal and disturbing back projection video of a fairground and launch into *Ghost Train (Part 1)* followed by *Patient AB*, the opening pairing from the album.

Both the overall sound and lead vocalist/bassist Michael Whiteman's voice take a few songs to settle, but the performances are first class. Whether it's the great melodies and four-part harmonies of *Dream Fortune*, the keyboard/guitar unison in *The Milgram Experiment* from John Murphy and David Addis (the latter going full Gadget Man by livestreaming the entire gig from his glasses... no, really!) or Ben Hartley's creative drive and flair behind the drum kit throughout, Manic Whale are a fine representation of contemporary British prog making a big splash.

Their subject matter stretches from the bravery of those who save lives at sea in *The Lifeboatmen* and the celebration of the genius of Ernö Rubik in *Ernö's Magic Cube* (during which Whiteman solves his prop Rubik's Cube in under 30 seconds while singing) to Jules Verne's steampunk submersible in the sweeping epic *Nautilus*, which is cheekily presaged by snatches of *Yellow Submarine*, and the powerful paean to children's adventure literature of *Secret Passage*. A particularly powerful version of *Open Your Eyes* wraps up the evening. This charmingly geeky, unpretentious yet supremely talented band demonstrate that they can duplicate their ambitious arrangements and tricky instrumental parts live while remaining thoroughly entertaining. Superb stuff.

GARY MACKENZIE

TANGERINE DREAM

VENUE	THE LONDON PALLADIUM, LONDON
DATE	08/11/2023

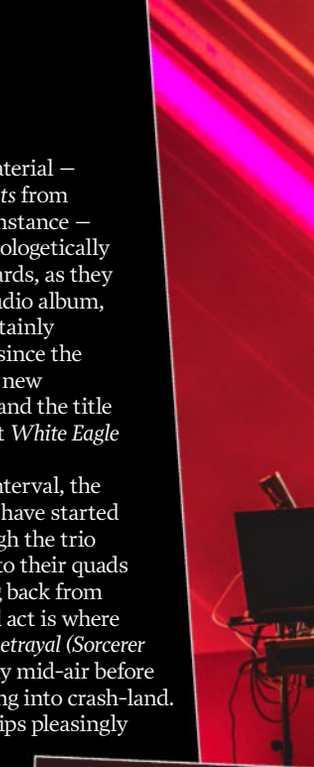
The godfathers of kosmische playing at London's mecca of light entertainment might seem like a mismatch on paper, but once Tangerine Dream are in full flow it all begins to make sense. Light entertainer Bruce Forsyth's ashes are buried under the boards of the Palladium's stage, and everyone from Arthur Askey to Zsa Zsa Gabor look down from the walls of its Edwardian corridors. The Tangs, too, carry ghosts with them, not least of all Edgar Froese, who led the good (space)ship TD for 48 years until his death in 2015.

Any concerns about the current trio fitting in are soon allayed when Thorsten Quaeschning takes to the stage. The custodian of the group in Froese's absence has the aura of an old-school magician, genteel in his style of presentation and dressed in a suit that wouldn't look out of place at The Magic Circle, and he bows respectfully and addresses the audience as if one of the Saxe-Coburgs is in the Royal Circle: "We'll be playing some old tracks, some new tracks and some very old tracks," he informs us.

Quaeschning is flanked by Japanese violinist Hoshiko Yamane to his right and the newest member of the band, Paul Frick (also of Brandt Brauer Frick), playing synthesisers to his left. Like the classic trio of Froese, Christopher Franke and Peter Baumann, each takes possession of their part of the stage while simultaneously aligning sonically as part of a symbiotic machine. The tour is billed as From Virgin To Quantum Years, and sure enough, they commence with the mighty *Phaedra*, the title track from the 1974 album. On *Phaedra*, Franke introduced the sequencer to electronic music for the first time, a game-changer immeasurable in its influence.

Then comes an array of songs that feel somewhat randomly generated — though when a band has more than 100 albums and each song takes around quarter of an hour to unfurl, there will always be questions as to why, say, the songs from *Force Majeure* have been overlooked for *Rare Bird*, a hidden track from the live *Poland* album. That said, the fact they're playing so much newer material — *Genesis Of Precious Thoughts* from 2017's *Quantum Gate*, for instance — demonstrates a band unapologetically confident in moving forwards, as they should be. Most recent studio album, 2022's *Raum*, is almost certainly Tangerine Dream's finest since the mid-80s and, accordingly, new instrumentals *Continuum* and the title track stand up well against *White Eagle* and *Love On A Real Train*.

Admittedly, come the interval, the mid-paced peregrinations have started to feel a little leaden, though the trio bound back in and return to their quads like office workers coming back from a boozy lunch. The second act is where the real gems are hiding: *Betrayal (Sorcerer Theme)* ambulates elegantly mid-air before descending like a jet coming into crash-land. The more recent *Portico* blips pleasingly like a cosmic vital signs monitor, and perhaps best of all is *Los Santos City Map*, a progressive electronic epic that reinterprets Froese's cinematic score for the



Hoshiko Yamane, Thorsten Quaeschning and Paul Frick: three is the magic number.

"If Tangerine Dream became an irrelevance during the 1990s, recent nods from *Stranger Things* and *Black Mirror* have propelled them back to a kind of relevancy they've not enjoyed since the Virgin years."

A seemingly random setlist, delivered with style.

CARSTEN WINDHOORST

Thorsten Quaeschning has us under his spell.

video game *Grand Theft Auto V*. If Tangerine Dream largely became an irrelevance during the 1990s, recent nods from meta pop culture must-sees like *Stranger Things* and *Black Mirror* have propelled the Tangs back to a kind of relevancy they've not enjoyed since the Virgin years.

There's one final treat in store when Nick Beggs sashays onto the stage dressed in skin-tight black leather for the final session of the night, an improvisational piece in D minor (chosen because it reverberates with the resonance of the room). Quaeschning introduces Beggs as "probably the best bass guitarist in the whole world". No pressure then. The revered musician brings his anaconda-like Chapman Stick to proceedings, and while some of what he does falls slightly flat, other moments are truly transcendent, which is a bit like the entire career of Tangerine Dream in microcosm. Nice to see them, then... to see them, nice.

JEREMY ALLEN

ELDER

VENUE	GORILLA, MANCHESTER
DATE	12/11/2023

Much like tonight's venue, which hosts its first prog gig since its a six-month refurbishment, Elder have gone through something of a glow up. The works may have been essential for the venue, but for the Massachusetts outfit, their sonic revitalisation has been voluntary. Their doom rock roots remain apparent – support acts Steak and Slomasa are proof of that – but their flirtations with prog and psych rock have helped push the genre to less predictable and ultimately more colourful places. Tonight's set attempts to straddle the line between the two worlds their audience come from.

Catastasis, the colossal opener to latest album *Infinite Passage*, is equally as gigantic, if not larger, in the flesh. Its grinding intro adds spikes and angles to the doom riff template and is sprinkled with whizzing keyboard runs and watery clean guitars before Nick DiSalvo's wrung-out vocals spread through the smoke-filled room. Its early bluster smoothly segues into lengthy ethereal passages, occasionally interrupted by jagged, overdriven motifs, rich guitar solos, swathing Mellotron textures and vibrant harmonies. Throughout the night, those harmonies become more vivid among the gloomy undercurrent that haunts their music, as exemplified on the slow-motion *Lore*, whose treacle-thick guitars are aimed at fans of the band's more primitive sound.

The opening bars of *Embers* sees pockets of the room bouncing along to its intricate post-rock grooves, which introduce another winding composition. Tom-heavy drums and airy guitars mark the verses, while the band continue to redress their doom riffs into new psychedelic garments. While *Lore* satisfies the doom-tinted kinks in the crowd, the spellbinding, 15-minute *Merged In Dreams – Ne Plus Ultra* finds the band at their most expansive. Across its luminescent spectrum, the Americans are at their most compelling. The rhythm section locks into a trudging mid-tempo foundation – their only tempo, if truth be told – on top of which guitarists DiSalvo and Mike Risberg, and live keys tinkerer Fabien de Menou, sprinkle sweetness.

From their spinning twin-guitar licks to the subtle harmonies that burst in and out the guts of riffs, Elder's music spurs on the evolution of a genre of rock that can sometimes be accused of sticking too diligently to its traditions. They may lose some fans in the process, and for others they still might not be proggy enough, but adding fresh spices to the doom rock recipe is admirable and the crowd tonight are all too willing to lap it up. As they end on the energetically quixotic romp of *Sanctuary*, the strongest of their songs to sit in the middle ground between then and now, *Prog* feels this is a transformation still very much in progress. They're not done exploring yet.

PHIL WELLER

ANIMALS AS LEADERS

VENUE	O2 RITZ, MANCHESTER
DATE	01/11/2023

It's been four years since Animals As Leaders' knotted soundscapes last graced UK stages, a wait extended since January after the band postponed the tour at the last minute. Despite returning to play venues twice the size as last time, AAL have made no effort to add to their stage show. One look around the gawping crowd will tell you that the trio – comprising two genuine modern-day guitar heroes and a drummer far from content taking a backseat – *are* the stage show. Indeed, very few bands on the planet can rely on pure talent to be a great spectacle.

The whiplash riffwork of *Tooth And Claw* is an instant shot to the arm as stabbing djent guitars coalesce with deft lead lines. The crunching rhythms of *Wave Of Babies*, beneath which Matt Garstka assaults his drum kit as if it owes him money, and the skipping, synth-led grooves of *Ectogenesis* keep things moving. The violent, heavily arpeggiated whirlwind of *Conflict Cartography* delivers the night's first taste of 2022's *Parrhesia*.

With the crowd suitably warmed up, the band serve up a six-strong streak of diversified delights. Tosin Abasi, working his way through a sizable fortune of his signature guitars, makes the multi-tasking, rhythm and lead amalgamating riffs of *Gestaltzerfall* look enviably effortless. The relentless rampancy of *Micro-Aggressions* then proves to the countless number of onlooking musicians that high-gain tones are not a prerequisite for brutal music. Here, clean tones rule supreme and yet it still sounds catastrophically heavy. The two tracks, rife with structural subversions and their innovative approach to making noise from their instruments, are fine examples of why Abasi and Javier Reyes stand at the forefront of modern guitar playing. Importantly, though, the genteel-turned-gigantean *Thoughts And Prayers* shows their songwriting can be as tender as it is brazen. Those moments of light among their grunting eight-string guitars, blur of warp speed sweep picking and thunderously convulsing rhythms, prove hugely important. *The Brain Dance*'s delicate classical guitars, for example, deliver respite at a crucial moment before the boisterous calculated chaos of fan favourite *Physical Education* gets the night's only 'singalong' as the crowd chant the track's bouncing motif.

The band hardly say a word between songs tonight. You could probably fit the entire transcript on the back of a stamp, and it doesn't matter. Their instrumental music does the talking far more fluently.

CAFO gets the final say. The standout single from their 2009 debut still holds up as an exercise in ferocious chops, although it feels at odds with the band's newer, far more palatable offerings. It's those songs, as the house lights go up, that live longest in the memory.

PHIL WELLER

GONG/OZRIC TENTACLES

VENUE	O2 FORUM KENTISH TOWN, LONDON
DATE	18/11/2023

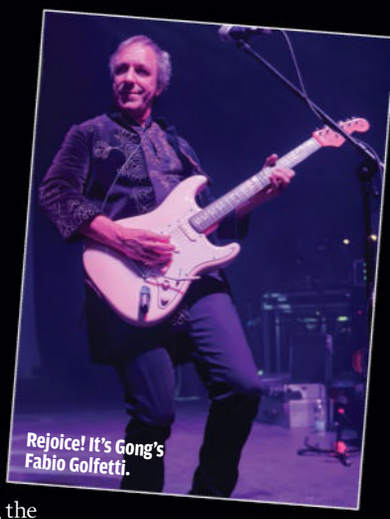
It's been exactly a year since these two purveyors of pungent effulgence roamed the UK together on the aptly named Joint Tour. Since then, both bands have added to their starred discographies. Tracks that had been tentatively previewed during those 2022 shows have now been released to critical and fan acclaim as tonight's sell-out will attest.

After leader Ed Wynne's return to the UK and enforced solitary confinement during lockdown, it's fantastic to have a group dynamic back in the **Ozric Tentacles** camp. This can be heard on latest album *Lotus Unfolding* and seen on his face; he clearly relishes being back onstage. The rhythm section consists of returning bassist Vinny Shillito and Pat Garvey, Principal Lecturer in Drums at BIMM Music Institute, no less.

Green Incantation may be fresh as a daisy (or should that be lotus?), but it has that classic Ozric DNA writ large across its clean guitar breaks and Eastern modes. It's so good to hear new music of this pedigree from the Wynne stable 40 years since the troupe's formation.

Eternal Wheel and *Erpland* send us back through the years to the band's most lauded period, when tonight's keyboardist Silas Wynne was but a young, sniffing pup. The temperature is allowed to drop a few degrees as Silas' partner Saskia Maxwell adds haunting breathy flute to the contemplative *Lotus Unfolding* — Ed Wynne must surely have had one of his primary influences Mahavishnu Orchestra in mind when penning this beauty.

Perennial classic *Kick Muck* is accompanied by seizure-inducing visuals from Fruit Salad Lights. So much has happened to Ozric Tentacles over four decades and yet so much has stayed the same. It's a treat to see a version of this band on top form and performing such great new music alongside fan favourites in 2023. Long may they continue.



Rejoice! It's Gong's Fabio Golfetti.

Few acts in the prog scene can claim to have been around as long as **Gong**. Yes, like the previous band, they're also a version of their past selves but there's no denying the signature Gong essence in set opener *My Guitar Is A Spaceship* from the latest album *Unending Ascending*. The band's living spiritual leader, Kavus Torabi, delights in its tricksy wrong-footing riff, a devious glint seems to say "Just try dancing to this one!"

The set contains almost no tracks more than a decade old. It's a gutsy move but wholly vindicated by songs the quality of *Rejoice!* and *My Sawtooth Wake*. The audience lap it up too. "Continuity Gong" has gathered its own momentum.

> **"Gong deserve respect for having the confidence to keep moving Daevid Allen's vision forward. That, folks, is the definition of progressive."**

The yin-yang *Ship Of Ishtar* and *Choose Your Goddess* comprise a significant chunk of *Unending Ascending*. They complement and contrast one another tonight as they navigate from ethereal glissando guitar to schizoid sax-blasting groove. Any leftover cobwebs from Halloween have been well and truly blown away. Wonderful stuff and a reminder that through the late, lamented Gilli Smyth, the power of the

Saskia Maxwell flaunts the flute with Ozrics.

Ozrics get trippy with some awesome Fruit Salad lighting.

WILL IRELAND

The transcendent Ian East and Kavus Torabi!

Dave Sturt: bass foot forward.

goddess, whether it be Selene or Ishtar, has always been integral to Gong's ethos.

Still the highlight of many a Gong show, *Master Builder* starts to make its presence known.

Cheb Nettles' ever-intensifying drumming is indeed masterful, building a tempest from a whisper. As it reaches its zenith, Saskia Maxwell, also a student and devotee of Turkish music and dance, takes centre-stage. Her dervish dancing becomes a spiritual nexus — the visual and sonic energy combine in her ghostly spiralling diaphanous form.

It would be so easy to be a Gong jukebox, relying on the past glories of others, lazily trotting out classics like *Master Builder* as nothing more than a tribute act. These musicians deserve respect for having the confidence to keep moving Daevid Allen's vision forward. That, folks, is the definition of progressive.

Both tonight's bands have announced a third and final co-headline tour for spring 2024. Billed as The Last Blast!, you'd be nutty to miss it.

CHRIS MCGAREL

Kavus Torabi dares you to try to dance to this!

PROTEST THE HERO

VENUE	UNDERGROUND ARTS, PHILADELPHIA, PA, USA
DATE	12/11/2023
SUPPORT	MOON TOOTH

It's been three and a half years since **Protest The Hero** put out *Palimpsest*, so their Halloween Is For Always tour focuses entirely on older tracks. That's not an issue, though, because tonight's concert showcases why their brand of zany progressive metal never goes out of style. Strengthened by support from the equally frenzied and fun **Moon Tooth**, it's an evening full of quirky costumes, banter and music.

Moon Tooth's tongue-in-cheek vibe is apparent as soon as they walk out to an electronic beat featuring loops of Jeff Goldblum's laugh from *Jurassic Park*. Highlights of their 45-minute set include the pop-punk/emo desperation of *Nymphaeaceae*, the rugged stoner/hard rock tinges of *Carry Me Home* and *The Conduit*, and the relatively calm and catchy *Alpha Howl*.

Protest The Hero offer a wide-ranging performance, with about as much content coming from *Palimpsest* as from predecessors *Volition*, *Scurrilous* and *Fortress*. Opener *Goddess Bound* establishes their penchant for non-stop theatrics, fusing dynamic rhythmic changes, manic guitarwork and Rody Walker's trademark screams and clean vocals into a grippingly complex and hectic journey. It – as well as *Soliloquy*, *All Hands*, and *Skies* – incorporates slower breakdowns and softer moments, too, but it's largely a chaotic ride.

None of the other songs are out-and-out peaceful, yet some of them (such as *C'est la Vie*, *Bone Marrow* and especially *The Fireside*) put more emphasis on emotional hooks and soothing arrangements. It's here that Protest The Hero best demonstrate their ability to craft melodically rich songwriting that gets virtually everyone cheering, singing and clapping every step of the way.

The show is further enhanced by Walker's and Moon Tooth vocalist John Carbone's humility and joviality, as they frequently make jokes and energise the already animated crowd. Walker spontaneously invites a woman to sing part of *Clarity* and, later, he eagerly brings someone onstage who's dressed as the racer from the *Hair Trigger* video.

On that note, the bands, audience, and venue fully embrace the spooky season. The room is full of flashing coloured lights and fake spider webs; plus, numerous people – including some of the musicians – are dressed in costumes that range from Barbie and Batman to ninjas, hotdogs and skeletons.

In multiple ways, Protest The Hero (and Moon Tooth) provide a delightful prog metal party. Not only do they play some of their greatest material, but they let their fun-loving personas shine between the tracks. Bolstered by the Halloween aesthetic, the night is a wonderfully festive and intense confirmation that both bands are still at the top of their game.

JORDAN BLUM

LINDISFARNE

VENUE	OLD FIRE STATION, CARLISLE
DATE	30/11/2023

Introducing *All Fall Down*, the late Lindisfarne mainstay Alan Hull's 1972 protest song about the demolition of parts of Newcastle's beautiful old city, Rod Clements says the town planners behind the 'makeover' claimed they could turn Newcastle into the Brasilia of The North.

"'Well, good luck with that', we thought," adds Clements with perfect comic timing. Like most venerable folkies of yore, he's great with crowds, skilled with patter.

As 2023 ends, Lindisfarne are undertaking a festive tour that will wrap at Newcastle City Hall, as is traditional for them. They're also enjoying something of a renaissance. A recent BBC TV doc on Alan Hull's genius narrated by hip young Geordie songwriter Sam Fender did some profile-raising, and a re-release campaign, which took in their ace 1971 LP *Fog On The Tyne* and a box set of BBC live sessions, also helped.

Tonight's Carlisle show is the first of two sold-out nights, and the stage is awash with instrumentation. With Clements – once Lindisfarne's brilliant bassist – now handling lead guitar, mandolin and fiddle; Alan's Hull's son-in-law Dave Hull-Denholm switching between guitar, harmonica and piano; and Steve Daggett juggling organ, guitar and harmonica, there's lots of able multitasking. The rhythm section of Ian Thomson (bass, upright bass) and Paul Smith (drums), meanwhile, is the band's finest since their 70s heyday.

We Can Swing Together and *Fog On The Tyne* are ripe for audience participation, and Carlisle is more than game. *Lady Eleanor* – Hull's mystical, mandolin-imbued augury of death – is spectral and magical, while *Winter Song* is perfectly seasonal, an icy beacon for the homeless and others for whom Christmas can be decidedly un-merry.

It's *Dingly Dell*, though, the title track of Lindisfarne's underrated third album, that shows their proggiest side: its rich, drone-based atmospherics couched in cavernous reverb. As Hull-Denholm sings its ancient-sounding melody, it's clear that he's wholly invested in Lindisfarne's important legacy. As the co-producer of Alan Hull's final, posthumously released solo LP *Statues & Liberties*, Hull-Denholm is both a trusted hand and a capable vocal conduit for his late father-in-law's most emotive songs. Tonight, these include *January Song* and the wonderful, part a cappella *Clear White Light*.

Clements, too, takes turns on lead vocals, leading the crowd through *Meet Me On The Corner*, a skiffle-ish No.5 UK hit for Lindisfarne in 1972, and airing his solo composition, *Can't Do Right For Doing Wrong*, a breezy, Dylan-esque finger-picker of considerable, bloke-in-a-relationship-putting-his-foot-in-it charm. Like Lindisfarne circa 1972, Lindisfarne 2023 bring folk, prog, blues, skiffle and more. A joy to witness live.

JAMES MCNAIR

TESSERACT

VENUE	THE ORPHEUM, TAMPA, FL, USA
DATE	11/11/2023
SUPPORT	INTERVALS

Intervals bring the fun... and all the colourful merch.

TesseracT have had an unusual 2023. Before the summer, the UK prog metal darlings hadn't released a new studio album in five years, with the quintet instead maintaining their momentum with some festival sets and their 2021 livestream release, *Portals*. But then the floodgates opened.

On July 12, TesseracT didn't just release their mammoth 11-minute single *War Of Being* (a return to the more experimental songwriting of their first two albums), they also announced their long-awaited fifth LP and a world tour that would take them across four continents in a mere seven months. When the demo version of a tie-in *War Of Being* video game also came out later in the year, it only reaffirmed that this band were returning to full-throttle and in their most ambitious form to date.

Acle Kahney: behold the power of the riff!

Before TesseracT can play at Tampa's Orpheum — a stage on the first of those four continents — however, they have to wait for **Intervals**. The Canadians are just as progressive as the headliner to come, except in a wildly different way. Led by guitarist Aaron Marshall, the instrumentalists emphasise pure technicality, with lightspeed fingers flurrying across fretboards during their every song. It's a formula that's often conducive to self-indulgent showing off, yet the band revel just as much in a sense of fun as they do their own talents.

Not only are Intervals' albums and merch drenched in all the colours of the rainbow, but their sets are crammed with lighthearted banter and flamboyant showmanship. Bassist Jacob Umansky twirls in time with his band's callus-shredding progressions, while Marshall — the project's de facto frontman — relishes taking to the mic and chatting with audience members between songs. The debut of new track *Mnemonic*, meanwhile, confirms that Intervals will continue with their triumphantly technical ways and will still be ones to watch.

After Intervals' collision of tech-metal theatrics with more down-to-earth personality, **TesseracT** arrive onstage with an air of mystique. As the Brits burst into *Natural Disaster* (the opener of *War Of Being*), they're reduced to silhouettes cast against a beautifully erratic light show. The musicians are only lit from below and behind, and those spotlights dance with just as much precision and intensity as the band's music. It's a cinematic extravaganza, especially when the tunes lean heavily into TesseracT's distorted, polyrhythmic, djent origins.

Musically, *Natural Disaster* summarises the full breadth of what this lot can do. It starts as an all-guns-blazing metal attack, the bull-headed riffing of guitarists Alec 'Acle' Kahney and James Monteith leading the charge alongside the snarls of Daniel Tompkins. That force, however, is offset by the mathematical wonderment of Jay Postones' drumming and Amos Williams' slap bass style. Tompkins quickly demonstrates he's just as excellent (if not more so) at melodic singing as he is at screaming with the arrival of the first irresistible hook.

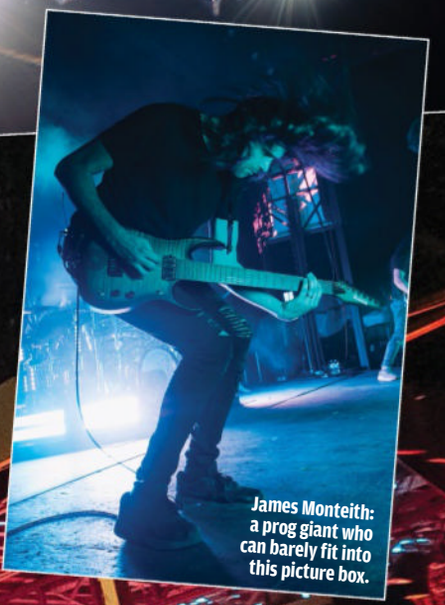
> **"TesseracT are operating in their finest-ever form right now. They're prog superstars."**

TesseracT lean heavily on their new *War Of Being* material throughout the show. After *Natural Disaster*, four more songs from the nine-track LP — *Echoes, War Of Being, Legion* and *The Grey* — get aired. And the band are right to be proud of their latest release. While *The Grey* offers a more concise and catchy cut in line with their two previous albums (*Polaris* and *Sonder*), *War Of Being* is a sprawling, dynamic triumph. Its juddery progressive metal

PRESS/RANDY EDWARDS

The *War Of Being* material is definitely no natural disaster.

TesseracT's future is very bright indeed.



James Monteith: a prog giant who can barely fit into this picture box.

crescendos, plus one of Tompkins' all-time best vocal passages during the bridge, instantly makes it a highlight of the night – no mean feat, considering the set also contains such reliable fan favourites as *Nocturne* and *Juno*.

As an encore of *Acceptance* straight into *Deception* revisits the *Concealing Fate* EP that launched this band's career, it's clear that TesseracT are operating in their finest-ever form right now. Their shows have never been better and their new music summarises everything that makes them special. If you don't know now, you soon will: TesseracT are prog superstars.

MATT MILLS

JAZZ SABBATH

VENUE	HOXTON HALL, LONDON
DATE	30/11/2023

Almost seven years since their final concert and the popularity and influence of heavy metal progenitors Black Sabbath show absolutely no signs of abating. Over in their home city, the Birmingham Royal Ballet have fashioned *Black Sabbath – The Ballet*, a theatrical event that sees contemporary dance applied to new orchestrations of familiar blasts from the rock canon. And down here in London, on this cold winter's evening, there are those who challenge the orthodoxy of Black Sabbath's history.

The screen behind the stage of this beautifully restored former music hall in the heart of London's East End shows a short pre-gig film to claim that it was indeed Jazz Sabbath – the brainchild of jazz pianist Milton Keanes – who'd actually brought those musical nuggets into existence. Having recorded two jazz albums in the late 60s – or so the story goes – a certain Brummie quartet pinched the songs for themselves after the master tapes supposedly went up in flames in a mysterious warehouse fire. And even if you squint hard enough and ponder the bizarre resemblance between Milton Keanes and Ozzy Osbourne guitarist and keyboardist Adam Wakeman, the story must surely be true because here are vox pops from Chesney Hawkes, Rick Astley and, er, *Prog* Editor Jerry Ewing to confirm it!

But for all the comedy shenanigans surrounding and included in the show (see the shaggy dog story concerning the origins of *Iron Man*), Jazz Sabbath largely succeed as a musical venture because they play it straight. Unlike previous endeavours that transposed classic rock texts into other genres purely for laughs – the memory of Dread Zeppelin still festers – here are musicians curious and skilled enough to see where it can be taken to treat the music with a high degree of respect.

Jazz Sabbath work best the further they move away from the source. So while the galloping pace of *Children Of The Grave* remains fundamentally the same bar, a switching up of the drum rhythms, it's with deeper cuts such as *Rat Salad* that the trio hold the attention. And while the original instrumental acted as a succinct calling card for Bill Ward, here Jazz Sabbath themselves shine under the spotlight. Drummer Juan Také (aka Arthur Newell) clearly enjoys making the most of his kit thanks to some skittering work with his sticks, while double bassist Jacque T'fono (aka Jack Tustin) interjects with smooth pulses as Keanes'/Wakeman's fingers dance exquisitely over his grand piano's keys.

Elsewhere, *Iron Man* is slowed down to a mournful blues that then picks up in pace to evoke the cool jazz styling of Dave Brubeck while nodding to The Beatles' *Eleanor Rigby*. Untethered from its moorings for an extended voyage, the encore of *Paranoid* confirms an evening that's more homage than pastiche.

JULIAN MARSZALEK

MONG TONG

VENUE	THE SHACKLEWELL ARMS, LONDON
DATE	13/11/2023
SUPPORT	MAYA ONGAKU

While *Coronation Street* slugs it out with *Panorama* on terrestrial TV on this damp Monday night, something surprising is occurring in the endearingly down-at-heel Shacklewell Arms in London's East End. Not only is the sold-out crowd packed in, it's also bucking the trend of incessant in-concert chitter-chatter currently blighting venues across the land. This is what a mesmerised throng looks like, and with the ambient sweeps, insistent beats and pulses, and the six-string cosmic explorations emanating from the stage courtesy of opening Japanese ensemble **Maya Ongaku**, the reason is obvious: this delicate, hypnotic and beguiling music demands nothing less than total immersion and attention.

Indeed, such is the fragility of opener *Nuska*, the natural response is to admire the band's chutzpah for not so much leaping out of the traps as floating out of them. But that wonder is soon rewarded with music that entices and seduces. Ryota Takano's insistent bass pulses during *Meiso* lock in with subtle yet effective processed beats, while Shoei Ikeda alternately plays keys and a heavily echoed saxophone to coalesce with Tsutomu Sonoda's expansive slide guitar-playing.

Guruguru Brain labelmates **Mong Tong** come at psychedelia from a completely different angle. If Maya Ongaku nod towards The Orb, then Mong Tong share a sensibility with Brian Eno and David Byrne's pioneering *My Life In The Bush Of Ghosts*, where localised samples and field recordings form the basis of their aesthetic. There's a whole world of Taiwanese culture waiting to be captured and offered via sounds that are manipulated this way and that; to this end, Mong Tong are every bit a celebration as they are an innovative duo.

Taking the stage, brothers Hom Yu (vocals, bass, percussion) and Jiun Chi (guitars, keyboards, electronics and percussion) elicit gasps of surprise as they blindfold themselves before launching into their musical creations. And this they do for the duration of their set, which makes their performance even more remarkable. Where Maya Ongaku float on a dream, Mong Tong are grounded in the everyday hustle and bustle of their domicile. Programmed beats skitter between Jiun Chi's creamy guitar-playing and Hom Yu's low-end grooves on *Tropic Sub*. The musical traditions of east and west are woven skilfully together on *Naihe Bridge* as cascading keyboards and minimalist guitar lines create a joyous fusion. Elsewhere, the squelchy and lolloping *Chakra* creates a musical vernacular wholly its own.

Fittingly then, this isn't an evening of competing talents but a double bill of creative visions.

JULIAN MARSZALEK

DAMNATION FESTIVAL

VENUE	BEC ARENA, MANCHESTER
DATE	03/11/2023-04/11/2023

Julie Christmas is merry and bright.

Almost 20 years since it was founded, Damnation Festival has long been a champion of metal's underground. But a move to Manchester's BEC Arena (formerly Bowlers Exhibition Centre) in 2022 expanded both the festival's capacity and scope for programming, and even its preliminary evening, A Night Of Salvation, has expanded to bigger bands this year. The line-up boasts a litany of exclusive album-in-full sets covering a spread of subgenres and styles that, while not all prog-friendly, certainly adhere to a principle of progressive, challenging music.

By the time **Enslaved** released 2003's *Below The Lights*, they were well on the way to embracing the prog sensibilities that would let them slip the bonds of black metal. Playing the record in full, the shift has never been more apparent. *The Dead Stare* introduces a Voivod-like dark psych freak-out, while *The Crossing* intertwines blast-beats with nimble acoustic guitars à la *Blackwater Park*-era Opeth. There's a sense of ponderousness to the set, however, as the record doesn't fully hit the highs of its successor, *Isa*.

Leprous have no such issues. "This album is where we really started to find our character," frontman Einar Solberg offers by way of introduction to a full playthrough of 2013's *Coal*, tackling the material with a sense of panache and dynamism that makes the set thrilling. Off-kilter rhythms and soaring vocal melodies put the band through their paces, but with each fresh flourish and stylistic left-turn — jazzy syncopated beats meet with snarling metal on *Chronic*, *Echo* shifts from metronomic riffs to nimble-fingered guitar picking — they affirm their creative brilliance.

> **"Glowing runes at the back of the stage lend an extra sense of theatricality that is more in line with Genesis than the Norwegian bands Enslaved first rose with."**

It's testament to Damnation's shifting sense of scope that **Katatonia** eschew their death-doom and gothic roots to instead explore 2012's *Dead End Kings*, the album that saw them go full prog. The resultant set offers grandiose melodies in the massive setting they deserve, and the appearance of The Gathering vocalist Silje Wergeland on *The One You Are Looking For Is Not Here* recreates their sublime collaboration from 2015's *Sanctitude* to lend an extra-special sense of occasion to the set.

While death metal and sludge riffs provide a stomach-churning start to the festival proper on Saturday, **Nordic Giants** emerge as a singular and distinctive force. Dressed in outfits halfway between *Peter Pan*'s lost boys and *The Wicker Man*, their set is an audio-visual extravaganza with short movies playing out onscreen as the two-piece play sweeping, emotive melodies and epic compositions. Loki and Rôka switch instruments from keys to trombone, drums to guitar — played with a bow, naturally — as each song requires, tapping into the weightless transcendence of trip-hop via the cosmic melancholy Pink Floyd could so often inhabit. Floyd even get a cheeky nod as one film showcases the iconic marching hammers and a blink-and-you'll-miss-it flash of *The Wall* art.

Adorned with colourful lights like, well, a Christmas tree, **Julie Christmas** has an undeniably ethereal presence onstage,

Katatonia in sync on stage. Their sound? Not so much.

SABRINA RAMADOYAL

Enslaved unleashing their inner beasts.

Nordic Giants are a towering presence.

headbanging and shifting like a malfunctioning automaton with an exaggerated stiffness that only accentuates the awning riffs her band play, like someone took whale song and gave it a metal soundtrack, the set a disorienting but thrilling experience.

Unfortunate sound issues mean **Katatonia** start their second set of the weekend much later than planned and are also forced to play a truncated version. That doesn't stop them from triumphing in spite of it all, however. The live debut of *No Beacon To Illuminate Our Fall* kicks things off with twisting, turning rhythms, while eventual closer *Behind The Blood* throws a bit of welcome arena-rock-style guitar grandstanding into the mix.

Winding the clocks back to their 1994 debut *Vikingligr Veldi*, one might think **Enslaved** would find prog in short supply as they return to their black metal roots. Credit to Håkon Vinje, then, whose keys add a swirling prog mysticism to the band's early material. Glowing runes at the back of the stage lend an extra sense of theatricality that is much more in line with Genesis than the Norwegian bands Enslaved first rose with, showing just how much they have evolved over the past 30 years.

RICH HOBSON

Leprous put *Coal* in our Christmas stockings.

LAIBACH

VENUE	O2 SHEPHERD'S BUSH EMPIRE, LONDON
DATE	08/11/2023

"This is the dawn of the third millennium of mankind. The planet Earth is now nothing but a dead room floating in space, destroyed by wars, pandemics and all the evil that men do."

And so begins Laibach's otherworldly show at the Shepherd's Bush Empire, with a *Star Wars*-style opening crawl projected onstage. Bandmembers dressed in off-duty military short sleeves appear under spotlights, and their latest collaborator, singer and multi-instrumentalist Donna Marina Mårtensson, enters in cowboy boots and with an acoustic guitar.

Tonight's performance is divided into three chapters. 'Post-Apocalypse' consists of Laibach performing eight back-to-back versions of *Love Is Still Alive*, the tour's namesake and a tongue-in-cheek ballad about love being the only survivor after the world's demise. They range from Leonard Cohen-style jazz, Daft Punk-inspired pop and Kraftwerk-esque electronica to minimalist ambient. The usually sombre singer and founding member, Milan Fras, dons a cowboy hat and sparkly gold jacket to perform a catchy country version of the repeated tune.

One never knows what to expect at a Laibach concert. The avant-garde Slovenian collective's music and unique performances, accompanied by clever political visuals and boundless artistic references, have enthralled and confounded audiences worldwide since 1984. Most famously, in 2015 they became the first Western band to perform in Pyongyang, to a stunned and mostly appalled North Korean audience.

After a 10-minute intermission, the second chapter of this evening, 'War', begins – a fitting title for the loud and arduous brutalist industrial setlist of Laibach classics to come.

The chilling spoken-word chorus of *Ordnung Und Disziplin* echoes within the theatre walls. A giant hammer and pickaxe smash into the shape of a socialist X to the rhythm of *Glück Auf!*'s thunderous beat. Finally, past bandmember Mina Špiler makes an appearance via the video backdrop, screaming into a megaphone during the anarchic anthem *Ti, Ki Izzivaš*.

Finally we reach the concert's concluding chapter, 'Repent', for an impeccable cover of Leonard Cohen's *The Future*, whose lyrics are another reference to our current world's decline, and a spectacular cover of *Sympathy For The Devil* accompanied by a sardonic video montage of Vladimir Putin footage. The final song and Laibach's latest, *The Engine Of Survival*, is a beautifully dystopian love song performed by Mårtensson and Fras.

As the venue's lights turn back on, tearing us from post-apocalyptic Earth into pre-apocalyptic reality, Laibach are granted a fitting standing ovation for yet another triumphant show.

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PRESS/AGOTTLIEB BROS

JON DAVISON (YES)

The great and good of progressive music give us a glimpse into their prog worlds. **As told to Grant Moon.**

Where's home?
Blighty! I met my now wife, Emily, daughter of John Lodge, on the 2019 Cruise To The Edge, and not long after I moved to England to be with her.

Earliest memory of prog?
One of the counsellors at a church youth weekend retreat had a copy of Rush's *Exit Stage Left*, and he invited a few of us to stay up late and listen. There was false talk in these circles of Rush being an acronym for 'Running Upon Satan's Hand'!

First prog album you bought?
It was *2112*, but my truly classic prog album purchase was a two-on-one Yes cassette, with *Fragile* on one side and *Close To The Edge* on the other. Can you think of anything better?

And the last?
I've recently gotten into King Gizzard And The Lizard Wizard. They really do weave an interesting blend of styles in such a fresh and unexpected way.

Your first prog gig?
Rush on their Power Windows tour at the Pacific Amphitheatre in Costa Mesa [in California, May 25, 1986], near where I grew up.

And the latest?
Father John Misty in Austin. He has a dulcet-toned voice enveloped by a moody melodic sort-of indie sound, and he's quite the clever wordsmith. He's not really prog, but his music is quite imaginative and elaborate just the same.

The best prog gig you ever saw?
My first Yes concert, again at the Pacific Amphitheatre, during the Big Generator tour [March 1988]. I have this vivid memory of listening to *And You And I* from the grassy hilltop on a perfectly warm, breezy evening. I was absolutely transfixed.

Your latest prog discovery?
I was never really exposed to Moody Blues' music until I met Emily and John. I've since dived deep into their extensive catalogue and have genuinely fallen deeply in love with their dreamy, romantic music. Isn't it the best when you get into a band and they happen to have so much material to discover?

Your guilty musical pleasure?
I have a definite soft spot for Tom Waits ballads, particularly those from his first album, *Closing Time*. My melancholy side just loves that album.

Your favourite venue?
The Royal Albert Hall. I've performed there with Yes four or five times now and it's always as surreal as it was the very first time. What an atmosphere!

Your prog hero?
Steve Howe. I'm so blessed to be in his close company quite often and I therefore absorb so much of his musical insight and inspiration. He truly is a master: one who has an innate musical gift and who's achieved so much.

King of melancholy ballads, Tom Waits.

PAUL NATKIN/GETTY IMAGES

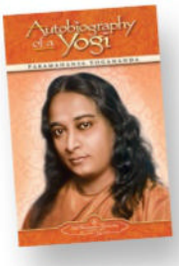
Outside of music, what do you enjoy doing?
Exercising in nature, and wild swimming whenever I get the chance. I'm a tree hugger at heart. I try and make more effort to meditate, which definitely puts things in proper focus for me. I also thrive on attempting to satisfy Emily's almost insatiable thirst for travel. Living so close to Europe means we have quite an interesting playground within convenient reach.

Ever had a prog-related date?
No. Where I grew up [Laguna Beach, CA] you had a fighting chance at getting a girl if you most definitely did *not* mention prog in any way, shape or form! Emily just patiently smiles in remote appreciation whenever prog music comes up...

> I've fallen in love with Moody Blues' dreamy, romantic music.

What's the most important piece of prog music?
Either *Close To The Edge* or *Firth Of Fifth*.

Recommend a good book to us!
Autobiography Of A Yogi by Paramahansa Yogananda offers deep insight into a whole new world of being. George Harrison once said he had a stack of copies and would pass them out to friends whenever one of them felt they needed 'regrooving'. Its footnotes also inspired much of the *Tales From Topographic Oceans'* lyrical outline, and it was apparently the only book Steve Jobs had on his iPad.



The prog musician you would most like to work with?
Steve Hackett. Although I've spent a little time with him and his lovely wife, Jo, I've never had the proper chance to fully express to him my immense appreciation of his guitar playing, and for his monumental contribution toward what is best in Genesis music.

Which proggy album gets you in a good mood?
Jethro Tull's *Songs From The Wood*. Great album.

Your favourite prog album cover?
Most likely the one Roger Dean will design for Yes' next new studio album! But I've always thought Rush's cover for *Permanent Waves* was quite clever. There are too many to list.

What are you up to at the moment?
Yes are on the verge of heading out across the US on our Classic Tales Of Yes Tour, which will promote our enthusiastically received new album, *Mirror To The Sky*, plus highlight much of the diverse canon of Yes music. We will definitely be bringing this show to the UK in 2024, which I can now proudly say is in my own back yard!

See www.yesworld.com for more.

NEW RELEASES

PETER HAMMILL
'IN A FOREIGN TOWN/ OUT OF WATER 2023'
(2CD EDITION)

- This 2CD set features new reworkings of two of Peter's landmark albums originally released in 1988 and 1990 respectively. The uncertainty surrounding the rights of both these original albums prompted Hammill to revisit both works in the studio, reworking and re-recording whilst also using elements of the original material to stunning effect. The finished results are remarkable and demonstrate the strength of the original compositions. No longer destined to be viewed as "a product of their time", these new 2023 reworkings of 'In a Foreign Town' and 'Out of Water' can be seen as vital recordings in Peter Hammill's extensive body of work. Release Date 24th November 2023

EANTCD21102

EDGAR BROUGHTON
'BREAK THE DARK'
(CD EDITION)

- This stunning record began life during the enforced COVID lockdown and evolved into a project that is truly special.
- The album features appearances by Edgar Broughton Band member Arthur Grant and cellist Calle Arngrip and has been mixed by the acclaimed producer and engineer John Leckie (who began his career as a Tape Operator on the first Edgar Broughton Band album 'Wasa Wasa'). 'Break The Dark' sees Edgar Broughton evolve his songwriting craft into something quite remarkable. It is a record which ranks as one of his most accomplished works. Release Date 27th October 2023

EANTCD1101

FISH ON FRIDAY
'8MM'
(CD EDITION)

- This is the band's sixth album and much anticipated follow up to the critically acclaimed 'Black Rain', features a line-up of Nick Beggs (bass and vocals), Frank van Bogaert (keyboards & vocals), Marty Townsend (guitars) and Marcus Weymaere (drums) and is the culmination of three years work. The sessions saw Nick Beggs assume the role of co-producer with Frank Van Bogaert.
- '8mm' is a fascinating collaboration between friends and kindred musical spirits and is their finest work to date. Release Date 27th October 2023

EANTCD1100

BAKER GURVITZ ARMY
'LIVE 1975'
(CD EDITION)

- New remastered and expanded release of this live recording by Baker Gurvitz Army from 1975.
- With fully restored artwork and a new essay.
- This archive release was recorded on the band's first UK tour as a five piece band in 1975 and features outstanding versions of tracks such as 'People', 'Memory Lane', 'Wotever It Is' and 'Freedom' (written by Jimi Hendrix).
- Release Date 24th November 2023

ECLEC2849

NEKTAR
'REMEMBER THE FUTURE'
(4CD/BLU-RAY BOX SET)

- This 50th Anniversary edition comprises 4 CDs and a multi-region Blu Ray disc and features a newly remastered original stereo mix of the album along with and additional two CDs featuring a previously unreleased concert recorded at the Stadthalle, Munster, Germany in January 1974 and stunning new 5.1 Surround Sound and Stereo mixes of the album from the original multi track tapes.
- Also included on the Blu ray disc are the original 1973 Quad mix and additional video content comprising of the rare 'Remember the Future' promotional film, the film of 'Wings' shown on BBC TVs Old Grey Whistle Test and a live performance of 'Desolation Valley / Waves' for the same TV show. Release Date 24th November 2023

ECLEC52846

THE MOVE
'SHAZAM!'
(REMASTERED VINYL EDITION)

- Of all of the groups to emerge in Britain in the latter half of the 1960s, The Move was arguably one of the finest. A powerful act on stage, the group were blessed with one of the most imaginative songwriters of his generation in Roy Wood. 'Shazam' is regarded by many as the finest Move album, despite being recorded in a time of flux for the band. It is rightly regarded as a true classic of the era.
- This new vinyl LP edition of 'Shazam' has been cut at Abbey Road Studios and fully restores the original LP artwork.
- Release Date 24th November 2023

ECLECLP2538

ARTHUR BROWN
'DANCE'
(EXPANDED AND REMASTERED CD EDITION)

- Unavailable for some years, this new Esoteric Recordings' edition has been newly remastered and expanded to include six previously unreleased bonus tracks, recorded by Arthur Brown and his band for the BBC radio In Concert series in April 1975.
- The release also features an illustrated booklet with new notes. Release Date 27th October 2023

ECLEC2847

ANCIENT GREASE
'WOMEN AND CHILDREN FIRST'
(CD EDITION)

- Featuring a wonderful blend of powerful psychedelic and progressive rock, the album was issued on Mercury in July 1970. Although it failed to make a commercial impression upon its release, the album is now highly sought after by collectors and fans of the Welsh rock scene and Man aficionados.
- This Esoteric Recordings edition has been remastered from the recently located original master tapes for the very first time, (previous releases having been taken from vinyl), and presents this legendary album in the best ever sound quality.
- Release Date 24th November 2023

ECLEC2851

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